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Q + A

[with our Lunch Lady partners]

How does your brand make the world a better place?

Grapat

We believe that the answer to a better world is a free, happy childhood. If children had enough opportunities to think for themselves, be creative, grow according to their interests and learn autonomously, then we'd have a better world. Our toys are a tool for kids to develop and discover all these skills.

Casiana Monczar
Co-Founder + Creative Director

Days & Daze

Days & Daze is committed to a cleaner, greener earth; our wines are made with the faintest footprint possible and may be organic, natural, preservative free, vegan or sustainably farmed. From our 100% recyclable or compostable packaging to our winemaking practices, we are as serious about creating sustainable change as we are about making delicious wine. That's why we have established the Brighter Days Sustainability Fund, donating 5% of all bottle sales to initiatives that contribute to a more sustainable planet and brighter days for the generations to come.

Kate Lawton
Brand Manager

Nature Baby

Nature Baby has been making the world a better place for the last twenty-five years. We have always strived to ensure ethical production practices together with quality products that last, and inspire, and also offer an alternative in a world filled with a bewildering array of options. Our aim is to be hopeful for the future, and to be part of taking positive steps to protect our world and the people in it.

Georgia Faull
Co-Founder + Creative Director

Tender Leaf

Beautiful well-designed toys that help children to learn through play. You will want to hand down our lovely toys to your grandchildren and keep them in your family forever. Sustainability and ethical standards are key to our brand and business. All our toys are made from reclaimed and renewable rubber tree wood, and for every tree that becomes a Tender Leaf toy, another is replanted. Designed in the UK, made and crafted in a fabulous family-run factory in Indonesia, all our toys are rigorously tested to the highest international standards.

Danielle Hanson
Creative Director

Birkenstock

The heart of our product is the footbed, 100% designed by nature, like a footprint in the sand. When you choose our products, you never have to compromise on comfort and foot health in favour of style.

Marcel Goerke
Managing Director

OPTY.NC

OPTY.NC products are formulated with natural ingredients selected for their performance, bioavailability and ethical production and produced following our ethics and sustainability Code of Conduct. We pride ourselves on transparency and honesty, ensuring that our products meet their claims and contain everything you need and nothing you don't so you can see the results we promise.

Cate Lilja
Co-Founder

Fat Bastard

Every one of the Fat Bastard wines in our range is unashamedly big and bold, so you know exactly what you're getting in every bottle. Our mission is to make deliciously drinkable and remarkably full-bodied wines but we're also hellbent on steering away from the world of wine connoisseurs that can often be intimidating to everyday consumers. We are proud to make our wines accessible and fun for all. Dinner is never dull with a Fat Bastard at the table.

Kate Lawton
Brand Manager

Anchovie

With retail and fashion now having to confront its systemic waste problem, it is a non-negotiable to encourage mindful and considered consumption. Anchovie was created knowing that when children adore something, they keep it forever, and love it as it ages with them. We could all learn something from that.

Bonnie Cleeland
Owner

GOMMU

Gommu's goal is to create the most sustainable toy brand. To do something better for our children and do something better for the planet. To play and learn with toys that are friendly for their future earth. To help them with their emotional, sensory and cognitive development. Our natural rubber products are made from the white sap of the Hevea *brasiliensis* tree, 100% biodegradable and produced through a green production process. All handmade, so each piece is unique, very soft, safe and hermetically sealed. They are also free from petrol, PVC and BPA.

Barb Bruno
Founder + Creative Director

Wildhood

Wildhood is here with a simple mission: clean, planet-friendly ingredients, yummy scents and super effective formulations tested by kids, for kids. The result? Aussie-made, 100% teen-friendly, pro-planet, cruelty-free deodorant that is as vibrant and adventurous as our kids are.

Malika + Jodi
Co-Founders

Dazed and Amazed

Making the world a better place feels like a huge task. Manufacturing, creating and shipping consciously in the ways most gentle helps. Considering we spend a third of our lives sleeping—we help create an oasis of rest, rejuvenation and calm in your world. In these chaotic, overwhelming times it's a little slice of betterment we all need.

Jes Saddington
Owner + Maker + Creator

Licetec

People all over the world face day-to-day problems that constantly change and evolve at a fast pace. This is why our focus as a brand has always been to continually innovate products for improving the wellbeing, health and safety of families, combatting the tiniest head louse to the biggest infestations.

Andrew Lou
Marketing Coordinator

Impossible Foods

Impossible Foods is on a mission to transform the global food system and reduce the impact of climate change by making the world's most delicious, nutritious and sustainable chicken, pork and beef products from plants—with a much smaller environmental footprint than meat from animals.

Tate Connolly
ANZ Marketing Manager

etch&ethos

Containing 94% naturally derived ingredients, all etch&ethos washes, lotions and refills are made in Melbourne, Australia, with 50% recycled milk bottle plastic. This commitment to sustainability helps divert around 200,000 used milk bottles from landfill yearly, plus the ingredients are ethically sourced and manufactured in line with international standard ISO16128.

Iro Trimmer
Communications Executive
+ Public Relations

Solidteknics

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Mark Henry
Development Engineer
+ Founder

Bobo Choses

We constantly work to achieve sustainable production of the collections, and at the same time, we believe in the power that kids have to understand, act and transform, even more than adults. The protection of the environment is a responsibility, but we can protect it while still having fun.

Lígia Torres
Communications Executive

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OPTY.NC is committed to creating a new *ingestible wellness* standard with *optimised*, multi-benefit formulations that *nourish* and visibly *improve* your skin, hair and nails whilst boosting your *gut* and *immune* health.

Thank you to our very talented and creative contributors!

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Acknowledgement of Country. Lunch Lady acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia. We acknowledge the Turrbal and Arakwal peoples, the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which Lunch Lady is made. We pay our respects to ancestors and Elders, both past, present and emerging. We acknowledge the deep spiritual connection and relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to this country and commit ourselves to the ongoing journey of First Nations Self Determination.

TAG

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food

050 Apple + Date Patty Cakes
052 Vanilla + White Chocolate 'Hamburger' Patty Cakes
054 Fudgy Chocolate Face Patty Cakes

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not so private parts

The ever-evolving Brandi Sellers-Jackson is a doula and founder of Not So Private Parts, an online platform and resource for women's issues and lived experiences. Here Brandi opens up about the empowerment to be found in knowing our bodies, ingesting joy as a form of resistance and how, as a Black mother, hardship and celebration go hand in hand.

Who's in your family and where are you based?

I'm Brandi; I live with my husband, John, and our three boys, Jax (16), Jedi (7) and Jupiter (4), and our dog, Chaka. We've recently relocated to Pasadena and we love it here, surrounded by the mountains; it's all fresh air and green.

What's it like having boys at such different ages?

I love it. Kids help you see and keep track of time while also reminding you how quickly it passes. I remember Jax being four years old, and now we're looking at colleges and universities. It's a good reminder that the things we're navigating with our little ones are so temporary. And it reminds me to think of the kind of humans I want to raise. We choose to raise our kids with the intention of guiding them as kids, as opposed to raising them as adults. They will be adults far longer than they're going to be children, so we try and put into them now what we want to see when they grow up to be adults.

What word would you use to describe yourself as a woman, mother and partner?

I think I'm a student in all of those roles, but for different reasons. As a woman, I'm always learning who I am in this body, right now, in this space. It all continues to look different. I'm not the same person now that I was many years ago.

As a mother, I'm always learning, too, because my kids always want and need something different as they change. I can't stay with the same practices I had when they were two or three years old—not when they are fifteen. So I have to give them space to grow, just as they've given me space to grow.

And being a partner also means evolving. We're not the same people as we were when we first met. We were eighteen and nineteen years old and then got married super young. We're now thirty-nine and forty so we've lived more of our lives together than apart. We're not even the same as we were before the pandemic.

I think 2020 did a lot for people—clarifying what's important, what's needed, and all of those things. It gave people broader insight and perspective. Our personal 2020 was brutal. It started with evaluating our partnership and marriage, then the pandemic hit and people were dying. There was racial upheaval, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the riots. We would see the National Guard go by during the riots with guns drawn on the back of their trucks; it was nuts. I remember closing the curtains and trying to create some kind of haven for our family during a time that felt chaotic.

What are you currently working on?

I am currently writing a book with Penguin—it's on thriving. It's part memoir, part prescriptive. I draw from the natural world, looking at ourselves as plants with highly evolved feelings. Asking the question of how we thrive in the rooms that we occupy, in rooms of grief, mental health, being 'othered', in relationships. All of these.

Why did you create your website, Not So Private Parts?

I started it because I had my first miscarriage right before Jedi. I wanted to tell that story and share my experience—how I navigated it. I also wanted to see how other people navigate that experience, but at that time, I couldn't find many resources about miscarriage. The more I shared, I realised so many people had stories of their own, not necessarily miscarriages but other things you're not supposed to be talking about. I wanted to share my story and share other people's stories. I wanted to create a safe space for people to open up.

Growing up in the South, everyone went to church on Sunday mornings. The preacher would get up, preach, and then they'd have a thing called testimony service, and all people would respond with "Amen". Amen, like an affirmation. Amen, I hear you. Amen, I see you. If I correlated it, an "Amen" is what we lack. We need more of that, in whatever form, whether it's a blog, forum, discussion or group. We need more of an "I see you"—we need an Amen response.

How have your subsequent pregnancies been impacted by your miscarriage?

I had to let go of control and surrender. The more I tried to hold on to control, the more I felt fear. I'd be trying to do all the right things instead of understanding it is all a roll of the dice and surrender.

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I wanted to create
a safe space for
people to open up.**

<<

What are we not talking about concerning women's bodies?

Several things, but Black women are dying at three to four times the rate of their white counterparts during childbirth—so that's one topic we're not talking about enough. I believe in words and vocabulary, and we're failing to specify not just that they're dying, but that racism is what is killing them. The weathering of racism experienced within birth—that's a big one that we're not talking about.

How do you advocate and fight for Black mothers dying in birth-related complications?

Being a doula is a big one, but it's tricky. I try my best to ensure that my folks who are Black are educated to know the process of birth, but more importantly, how to advocate for themselves. But there's a bigger system at hand that needs to shift dramatically–I can't fight a whole hospital, a whole system.

As a doula, are you surprised by how little people understand their body's capacity to change, adapt and grow?

Absolutely, I feel it should be taught in school. People aren't even versed in the names of their body parts. When someone says 'vagina', they think it's the whole caboodle. Many people don't know their bodies at all, and I wish it was taught. I gave a period talk for my eldest son's school. I remember they had the guys and girls in the same room, and I thought it was so great because they all need to know how bodies work. It also diffuses the taboo early on.

Why did you co-found Moms in Colour, your online collective for Black mothers?

I co-founded Moms in Colour with four other amazing women: Kelly McKnight, Ashley Chea, Candice Montgomery and Christina Brown. We founded it because there was a need. We were tired of going to events and being in spaces where we were the only Black folks there. I thought, This doesn't feel right so let's shift it and create something that brings Black women together so we can celebrate and not wonder why we were invited to the party. It's a space where we can all just be.

Are you a feminist?

From what I know, a feminist advocates for equal rights for women. So in that sense, yes, but what I also advocate for is equity. If the feminist movement focused more on equity, we'd be better off. We need to think about equity, the different levels of oppression and how they all intersect. So if anything, I'm an intersectional feminist.

Moving through the portal from maidenhood to motherhood, what surprised you most?

The shift from maiden to mother with my oldest was gnarly. I was young, I wasn't expecting it, and it caught me entirely by surprise. I remember feeling this need to get back to what I was like before.

>>

> ***People aren't even versed in the names of their body parts. When someone says 'vagina', they think it's the whole caboodle. Many people don't know their bodies at all, and I wish it was taught.***

I didn’t know just to sit in it and understand that I wouldn't be the same person again. I think with my other two, I learnt that you’re forever changed with every pregnancy. You’re forever different. Your baby leaves traces of themselves with you.

Transitions—pregnancy, birth, postpartum. How are you preparing for the next big one—menopause?

I’m definitely thinking about menopause. I love my kids and am so complete so we’re not having anymore. So that’s the next frontier and honestly, I’m looking forward to it. I have good friends that have started going through menopause, and I’m excited. I think many people don’t talk about it because it relates to the end of our reproductive capacity and our value as women. Like all things, it’s a transition, it’s a phase that we go through and the more we prepare ourselves, the better off we are. I think a lot of people don’t prepare themselves. We don’t prepare ourselves for birth, and we also don’t prepare for postpartum. I think postpartum, in a way, can prepare us for menopause—postpartum is a prerequisite of the awareness we should operate within menopause.

I have good friends that have started going through menopause, and I'm excited. I think many people don't talk about it because it relates to the end of our reproductive capacity and our value as women.

You were raised among girls and now you’re raising sons, what’s that like?

It’s different in every way. I thought for sure I would have girls because that’s all I knew and now I can't see it any other way. I think the way they communicate is so different. My house always sounds like WWF play wrestling. The way they communicate is just loud and they’re very physical. My mother, my sister and I—our communication was emotionally driven. Such different energy. There’s also the part where my childhood was riddled with loud noises but not happy loud noises. Up until age ten, it was violent. The loud noises of my house here with my boys are filled with laughter and toys flying through the air.

You lost your mum a few years after becoming a mum. How did you continue to connect with her?

Jax was five years old and I didn’t see it coming. As a mother and daughter, I still had questions. I had no choice but to lean into my own motherhood because the way my mother and I parent was always going to be different. Neither bad nor good, but just different. I loved the way my mother mothered. I think she mothered the best she knew how and the best she could. But I also think she would want me to look at her mothering, take out the pieces that worked and leave the pieces that didn’t. Put them to the side. I know she would want me to do that.

If she were here now, she’d be like, “Listen, there are certain things that you can tell them over and over again and they’re just not going to get it until they get it. Let them get it when they get it.” This is one thing that I've strived to adapt and honour with my boys.

As the woman in the house, are you conscious of what you mirror for the boys?

We have a lot of open conversations. I’m always aware that, as their mother, I’m the first relationship they’ll have with a woman. I try to model all the things I want them to see. And I'm very transparent with them, so they see me in my womanhood, my humanity, as much as they can take, that is. They see me in the bathroom, rinsing out my period underwear, and they're not fazed. Instead, Jedi was wondering when he would get his period. Also, Jax was there for Jupiter's birth—he was the one who caught Jupiter. He was at both his brothers' births but he caught Jupiter. For so many men, the first time they see a baby being born it's their own baby, and that's not my boys' reality. I feel like I can say, "You're welcome!" to whoever partners with our boys.

How do you support your boys to connect with their bodies? Are you and your partner intentional in supporting your boys to shed conventions and toxic masculinity?

Transparency is a big thing, so we talk about all the things. Preteen boys are nuts, discovering themselves and discovering their bodies, so we have all the conversations around that.

One of the biggest things we try to do is allow them space to talk about their feelings, because I don't think a lot of men talk about that or give each other space to talk about feelings. Also, my husband tries to talk to them about ensuring they're creating a safe space for women. Not just, "Don't be an asshole," but be anti-those things. Like racism: it's not enough to say I'm not racist; you need to be an antiracist.

Raising Black boys who will become Black men in America—how does that feel to navigate as a mother and a family?

I have three boys. I have one that's going to be out in the world in less than two years, so we're almost there. It gets tricky because you just have to hope that what you've given them is enough. We're at the place where Jax can learn to drive, but he's afraid. He's afraid of what happens if he gets pulled over. We've always had those conversations, but it's different now he's at the place where he actually could drive but isn't sure if he wants to. It's tough, but at the same time, you have to teach them to live. It comes back to modelling. We know what's out there, but we have to live and we have to have joy. We have to find joy and thrive. Joy is how we resist, because if we're always feeding ourselves trauma after trauma, we can't live that way. It's not sustainable.

And let's be real, a lot of Black folks know what's happening. We know. We know what happened to those who came long before us. I know it. I feel it. I feel it when I go to the ocean. I feel the vastness and the journey of being taken from one point to another. So you don't have to tell us—we know. It's in our DNA. Black trauma is weathering for Black people, and that's why we have to feed ourselves joy. Not only for ourselves but also for our children, so we can be here with them long term. Then also for the folks who came before us, so we can honour our ancestors. I ingest joy for all of them.

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Higuchi
Sakuya

the truth about lying.

Psychologist and author Dr Victoria Talwar wants you to know that lying is a normal part of development—but that doesn't mean we should lie to our children.

Can you tell us about yourself and your work?

I'm a mum, a professor and the Canada Research Chair in Forensic Developmental Psychology. I'm particularly interested in children's social cognition and moral development, which has been my focus for over twenty years. Much of my work has been on children's honesty and their lie-telling behaviours and how we can promote children's truthful disclosure. This work has then spilled into the legal system and using children's witness testimonies—where, of course, we want very truthful disclosures because they're often about very serious events.

Your work with the courts and children's testimony sounds interesting.

Once I started my research, I had lots of lawyers come knocking because, obviously, they want to make sure they get accurate disclosures.

Children are often excluded from giving testimony because of things like a competency examination that they might sit first. In the competency exam, the child might be asked about their understanding of truth and lies. If they can't give adequate answers, the judge might not consider them competent to testify, which is serious, because in many cases their testimony is the key to the case. And if their voices aren't heard, the perpetrator might get off simply because a child couldn't give a clear explanation of what a truth is and what a lie is.

But my research showed that children's abilities to define the truth in a lie has nothing to do with their actual truth-telling or lie-telling behaviour. Many adults know what a lie is and know it's bad, but it doesn't necessarily affect whether they tell the truth in court, because they might have other motivators. In actual fact, children, especially young children, are much more likely to tell the truth. That research led to some legal reform here in Canada.

Why does the subject of lying interest you?

It stemmed from my interest in cognitive behaviour. As children get older, they start developing an understanding that other people have thoughts, beliefs and knowledge that are different from theirs. And this is important for development because almost all our social interactions and communication depend on the understanding that people think differently—it's called 'theory of mind'. And to lie, you have to develop a sense of what you think someone else thinks and knows and then create a false belief for that person.

When I started my career, there wasn't a lot of empirical research about when children begin lying. We only had two concepts stemming from folk stories. On one side, we have the story of *The Emperor's New Clothes*, where a child is represented as the ultimate truth teller. And on the other, we have the Pinocchio story, where children are represented as avid liars. I started doing basic research to understand when children actually start lying and why. And that research is in my book, *The Truth About Lying*.

Is lying part of normal development?

Yeah, it is. I think most people lie on occasion, but the research shows that, by and large, most people are honest most of the time. When it comes to children, lying is part of normal cognitive development. Because when they learn that other people have different ideas and thoughts, they are also developing executive functioning abilities like inhibitory control and self-regulation, and their memory improves. That's because to lie well, you need to self-regulate your nonverbal behaviour, so you don't give anything away. You also must remember what you said to ensure your subsequent statements are congruent with the initial lie. That's why, initially, children are really bad at lying—a toddler will have chocolate all over their face but deny eating the cookie. As they get older and their brain develops more, they get better at lying.

> ***When it comes to children, lying is part of normal cognitive development.***

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I think most parents are shocked when they first catch their child lying to them, but lying is just a by-product of positive cognitive development, and it's crucial to their future social interactions. A parent's job is to help teach the child the benefits of truth-telling and socialise them on how to behave.

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Do adolescents lie more than adults?

Yes. We have a bit of an inverted U-curve in terms of lying. Lying emerges around preschool years with little fibs, and by adolescence, we see children are more motivated to lie about things that will give them some autonomy over their lives.

If teenagers perceive a lot of control in their lives, they may be more likely to resort to lying to conceal behaviours they think their parents would disapprove of. Lying is a way to control those behaviours and mitigate negative consequences. But as we move into adulthood, we become less likely to use lying as a social strategy in our interpersonal relationships.

Is it okay to teach our children to lie in social situations that require politeness?

That's one that parents really have to think about. Some parents believe it's fine to tell pro-social lies and are comfortable with their children doing it—and that's okay. But there's also the option to teach your child how to be polite and consider people's feelings without lying.

Parents must think about what they believe is important for children and reflect on their own values. If they are telling their kids that honesty is the best policy, they must demonstrate that in all situations.

Your book talks a lot about understanding the motivation of a child's lie. Why is that important?

If you understand the motivation, you can address the actual reason why they lied instead of just reacting to the fact that the child lied. And if we address the underlying motivation, they're less likely to have reason to lie again.

Here's an example I've come across: A mother discovered her child was lying about eating lunch. He was getting tired in the afternoon and the teachers contacted the mum, saying, "You need to give him lunch." The mum had been giving him money for the cafeteria at school, and she assumed he was using that money. It turns out that a bully had been taking the money off him, and he had been lying to his mum, saying he was buying lunch.

At first, the mum was really upset when she discovered the lie, because she thought her son was stealing the money. But upon further investigation, the true situation was revealed and could be dealt with properly—including counselling for the bully and the victim.

But there are also other examples, like when a child lies about their achievements and tries to make people think they're better at things than they really are. We call those lies 'impression management', which might be a sign that the child has problems with self-esteem. That's something you can help your child with.

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Higuchi
Sakuya

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And sometimes, the lie might be about a fear of consequences—like when a child doesn't talk about cyberbullying, even if they're victims of it, because they fear the consequence will be having their phone taken away. If we understand the motivation, we might be able to address that fear in advance so they realise they don't need to lie about it.

How should we react when we catch our children lying?

I talk about a three-step response in my book: remain calm, address the underlying motivation and then discipline the child.

If you're really upset, you are less likely to be able to address the behaviour and see the full picture of why your child is lying. That means you're less likely to find a solution that not only deals with the lie but may also deal with the underlying motivation. If you need to take some time, do it. Tell them, "I'm upset that you lied, and there's going to be a consequence for it," and come back to it when you can think properly. But make sure there's an appropriate reaction in terms of discipline.

Sometimes it's not necessary to discipline if it's a small child and a tiny lie, because being caught out is already a negative-enough consequence. But other times you're going to have to set an age-appropriate discipline.

We should also take time to educate our children on the importance of honesty—just don't do it in the heat of the moment when you've caught your child lying. Do it at another time when your child isn't feeling defensive and you're less likely to turn it into a lecture.

How can we teach our children about honesty and foster it in them?

There are many ways to teach kids about honesty. You can have conversations about it and talk about why it's important, or tell stories about honesty.

And labelling honesty is really important, especially for young children. When your kid tells you the truth, it's worth saying, "I appreciate that you told me the truth." That also means you have to be prepared to hear the truth, which isn't always nice if you've spent ages making a really nice dinner and your child says, "I don't like it." That's a very small example, but as children get into their teenage years, they may be doing things you're not thrilled to hear about. But it's important to develop a relationship where they feel they can tell you the truth, even when they think it's something you won't be happy about, because it's better to know what they might be doing and be part of their lives than have those things hidden. You want to have a relationship where your children feel they can be truthful with you.

Should parents ever lie to their children?

The short answer is no. I know many parents might say things like, "Oh, the ice cream shop is closed today," and parents need to be compassionate about that because, sometimes, when you have a toddler, you just need to get out of the shopping centre. But you shouldn't regularly be doing it. And when you catch yourself telling one of those lies, you can use it as an opportunity to problem-solve how to get out of that situation without resorting to a lie next time.

The reason you don't want to lie to your kids is because research clearly shows that children who have parents who lie to them are much more likely to lie to their parents. Especially as they get into their teenage years and early adulthood. There's also a higher rate of negative social adjustments—they'll have negative internalising and externalising behaviours. The bond and the relationship you form with your child need to be based on trust and trustworthiness. That means you must expect and demand it from your children and exhibit and model it for them.

What are your thoughts about lying to kids about Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny and the Tooth Fairy?

These are cultural stories told on a large scale throughout Western societies, though some people don't have this tradition. For instance, I am not Christian, and we don't celebrate Christmas, so I didn't tell the story of Santa Claus to my child—of course, he knows about it because he lives in a Western country where the media talks about Christmas for months.

Unlike many other lies on a personal level, this 'myth' has a cultural meaning and tradition behind it, making it less easily categorised as a 'lie'. When everyone subscribes to a tradition, it has a different meaning.

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So, I believe it depends on the parents' traditions and cultural background. There is no evidence to tell us whether it is good or bad. And given that the majority are practising it, individuals are less likely to perceive it as a lie or having harm. I will caveat by saying: research needs to be done to understand the impact, if any.

Do you have any tips for parents needing to explain the truth about these stories to their kids?

It depends on how it comes up. If a child asks, "Is Santa real?" or they say, "Brian said Santa Claus is just a story," you can ask them, "What do you think?" or other reflective questions. Reflective questions enable you to hear their thoughts and let them conclude for themselves, because some children may not be ready to let go of that myth and still want to believe.

Personally, I don't think there is harm (again, there is no empirical evidence here) in letting children believe and have the magic of it. As they get older, they will naturally become more sceptical. And if they quiz parents, I think parents should be honest about it and not try to perpetuate the myth beyond the credulity of the child.

Any advice for parents who are unsure whether or not they want to partake in these traditions?

New parents should try to reflect and think about what they want to do and why. People often find themselves in the midst of it without properly considering it. If parents take time to think about what they feel comfortable with and why, they will be more consistent in their behaviour, which allows them to send messages and demonstrate values to their kids that align with their own values. That will be more satisfying to the parents and give them confidence in their choices.

Anything else on this topic?

This is the topic I dislike talking about the most when it comes to lying, and I try to avoid it because it's very culturally loaded. However, my last point is the most important one. If we are mindful of what we value and proceed from that place of authenticity, I think we will be more consistent as parents and feel better about our parenting practices.

What did you learn about parents when writing your book?

I observed that parents worry a lot about their children learning things like reading and writing. And when you ask a parent what they want for their child, they often say things like, "I hope she's a lawyer." But they don't often talk about character traits like honesty or kindness. And at the end of the day, these traits matter and make a big difference to our relationships and lives. We need to place greater importance on these virtues, and as parents, we are our children's first educators.

Has your work taught you anything about yourself as a mother?

My work has underscored the importance of developing a strong bond with my child, and how trust is the foundation for everything else upon it. When you have trust, it's the bedrock of the relationship.

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If we are mindful of what we value and proceed from that place of authenticity, I think we will be more consistent as parents and feel better about our parenting practices.

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Patty cake, patty cake, baker’s man, bake me a cake as fast as you can. Roll it and prick it and mark it with ‘B’. Put it in the oven for baby and me.

It’s more than three hundred years old, one of the oldest surviving English nursery rhymes—one that became particularly popular here in Australia.

The earliest known version of the ‘pat-a-cake’ rhyme appears in a 1698 play, when a nurse recites it to the baby she is caring for. From there, it became a popular poem, published in Mother Goose nursery rhyme collections and eventually set to music. A ‘hand-warming’ game often accompanied the rhyme, with hands clapped together for ‘pat-a-cake’, rubbed together for ‘roll it’; the palm of one hand ‘pecked’ with the forefinger of the other for ‘prick it’; and both hands thrown up for ‘put it in the oven’.

Part of the rhyme’s appeal among children is the ability to adapt the lyric ‘mark it with ‘B’’ (for baby) to the letter for their own name. This reference to marking the cake with a letter is thought to stem from a time when many households didn’t have their own ovens and would pay a local bakehouse to have their cakes or pies finished off in the oven there. The initials on top of the items would indicate which family the baked goods belonged to.

From the 1930s in Australia, patty cakes became a part of everyday life during what historians have described as the ‘Golden Age of the Patty Pan’: an era when households produced a huge amount of home baking to supply lunch boxes and social activities.

The decorative graphics on the paper ‘patty pans’ made at the time are seen as historical treasures, featuring designs suitable for children’s parties, high teas and even patriotic events. One such design celebrated the completion of the Sydney Harbour Bridge in a specially made elongated pan—perfectly proportioned to show the two sides finally coming together. Retail bakeries and cake manufacturers also commissioned their own patty pan designs, featuring their own in-house logos—some of which are still in use today.

At some point in the 1990s, the term ‘patty cake’ was well and truly overtaken by ‘cupcake’—a description long used in American cookery recipes for light cakes designed to be baked in individual moulds, ramekins or cups, until muffin tins became widely available. This version of individual cake also tended to be more elaborately decorated, with colourful frosting and sprinkles, compared to the traditional patty cake, which tended to have just a sprinkling of icing sugar dusted on top, if anything at all.

> At some point in the 1990s, the term ‘patty cake’ was well and truly overtaken by ‘cupcake’—a description long used in American cookery recipes.

The internet has further flattened regional variations in culinary language, and these days people hardly ever seem to talk of patty cakes—it’s all cupcakes, fairy cakes, mini-muffins or ‘cake-pops’. But before those Americanisms took over, any miniature cake served Down Under was a patty cake, wrapped in a patty case and baked in a patty pan. You can still find echoes of our Australian name for these tiny sweet treats around the place: check out the baking aisle at the supermarket, where local brands still proudly offer polka-dot paper patty pans to pour your cake batter into, and patty cans to bake them in. (Rest assured these are the same standard size required by cupcake recipes—they’re just holding onto their national identity!)

The rhyme and clapping game can survive too—as long as you pass it on … as fast as you can.

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APPLE + DATE PATTY CAKES

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Refined sugar free

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Makes 12–14 cakes

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For the cakes

100g / 3.5oz dates (about 15 pitted dates)
150g / 5.3oz / 1 1/4 sticks butter
100ml / 3.4 fl oz maple syrup
2 eggs
1 tsp vanilla
1 1/2 cups flour
2 tsp baking powder
3/4 tsp baking soda
1 tsp cinnamon
1/2 cup Greek yoghurt
100g / 3.5oz apple, peeled and grated (about 1 large apple)

……

1. Place dates in a small bowl and cover with boiling water for 10–15 minutes. Strain off water, finely chop the dates and set aside.

2. Heat oven to 180°C / 350°F / Gas Mark 3.

3. Grease a medium-sized patty cake or muffin tin.

4. In an electric mixer, beat butter and maple syrup together until creamy.

5. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Add vanilla. (The mixture might not come together at this stage, but it will as the remaining ingredients are added.)

6. With mixer on low speed, add sifted dry ingredients alternately with yoghurt.

7. Finally, stir through grated apple and chopped dates.

8. Spoon into tin and level out. Bake for 30 minutes, or until a skewer poked into the centre of a cake comes out clean.

9. Remove from oven and place on a cooling rack. Gently remove cakes from tin and leave to cool.

///

To ice and decorate

100g / 3.5oz / 1 stick butter
200g / 7oz cream cheese, cut into smaller chunks
75ml / 2.5 fl oz maple syrup
1 tsp vanilla extract
Jaffas (to make little ‘apples’ to decorate)
2 1/2 tbsp melted chocolate (to make the ‘apple’ stalks)

1. Beat butter until pale and creamy.

2. Add cream cheese gradually, one chunk at a time until incorporated.

3. With electric mixer running on low speed, dribble maple syrup into icing, followed by vanilla, and beat until combined.

4. Spread some icing on each patty cake and push a Jaffa (or 2) gently on top of the cake.

5. With chocolate in a small piping bag, make a little line for an apple stalk.

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Tip

These cakes are moist and will keep well in the fridge for a few days. If you’re making them ahead of time, it’s best to add the Jaffa apples on top just before you serve.

VANILLA + WHITE CHOCOLATE 'HAMBURGER' PATTY CAKES

. . . .

Makes 12–14 cakes

. . . .

For the cakes

125g / 4.4oz / 1 stick butter
1/2 cup sugar
100g / 3.5oz white chocolate
175ml / 6 fl oz milk
2 eggs
1 1/2 cups flour
2 tsp baking powder

1. In a small saucepan over gentle heat, melt butter, chocolate and milk together. Set aside to cool.

2. Preheat oven to 170°C / 340°F / Gas Mark 3.

3. Grease a standard-sized patty cake or muffin tin.

4. Sift dry ingredients.

5. Beat eggs and sugar in a bowl with an electric mixer until light and creamy.

6. Reduce speed to low and dribble in melted chocolate mixture until all combined.

7. Spoon dry ingredients and gently beat until all mixed in.

8. Pour batter into muffin moulds and bake for 20–25 minutes or until a skewer poked into the centre of a cake comes out clean.

9. If you're feeling brave, turn your oven to 200°C / 400°F grill and brown the tops of the patty cakes very briefly for a minute or two so they look like a toasted burger bun. You'll have to watch them very closely so they don't burn!

10. Remove from oven, flip patty cakes out of the tin and leave to cool.

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For the chocolate 'cheese'

100g / 3.5oz white chocolate
turmeric powder (we found about 1/2–1 tsp to be enough. Add this gradually until you get the desired yellow colour—turmeric does have quite a strong flavour!)

1. Melt chocolate in a small bowl, then add desired amount of powdered turmeric and mix to combine.

2. Drop large spoonfuls onto a baking mat or a piece of baking paper and, using a butter knife or the back of a spoon, shape them into a small square shape about 8cm x 8cm (or big enough that they're the right proportion for your burger).

3. Leave to cool and set, ready for assembling.

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For the chocolate rice bubble 'patties'

100g / 3.5oz dark chocolate
1 1/2 cups rice bubbles
1 tsp coconut oil or butter

1. Melt chocolate and oil together.

2. Pour over rice bubbles and stir to combine.

3. Push spoonfuls into the bottom of a muffin tin and flatten out to make small patties.

4. Chill until set and remove from tin. They will keep well in an airtight container in the fridge.

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For the final decorations and to assemble the burgers

strawberries
berry jam, optional
an edible green leaf (we used nasturtium)
1–2 tsp white chocolate or sesame seeds

1. Slice each patty cake through the middle so you have a bottom and a top.

2. Spread some jam on the bottom half. Stack a 'patty', some sliced-up strawberries, a slice of 'cheese' and a leaf on your patty cake bottom, and put the lid on top.

3. Using a small amount of melted white chocolate in a piping bag, or sesame seeds, decorate the top of the 'burger' to complete the look.

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FUDGY CHOCOLATE FACE CAKES

. . . .

Gluten free

. . . .

Makes 12 cakes

. . . .

For the cakes

200g / 7oz / 1.7 sticks butter
1 cup brown sugar
3 eggs
1 tsp vanilla extract
75g / 2.7oz rice flour
50g / 1.8oz tapioca flour
1 1/2 tsp baking powder
3 tbsp cocoa
1/2 tsp cinnamon

1. Preheat oven to 180°C / 350°F / Gas Mark 3.
2. Grease a 12-hole standard-sized muffin tin.
3. Place butter and sugar in bowl of an electric mixer and beat until light and creamy.
4. Add eggs one at a time, beating well after each addition. Add vanilla.
5. With mixer on low speed, spoon sifted dry ingredients into wet ingredients until they are just mixed through.
6. Spoon into prepared muffin tin and bake for 25 minutes, or until a skewer poked into the centre of a cake comes out clean.
7. Gently remove cakes and leave to cool on a cake rack.

To decorate

150g / 5.3oz / 1 1/4 sticks butter
1 1/4 cups icing sugar
2–3 tbsp cream
2 tsp vanilla extract
cocoa powder
cinnamon
liquorice laces, for smiles
small flat pieces of liquorice to make eyes
thin pink lollies for the cheeks

Tip

Pulling liquorice allsorts apart works well for eyes and cheeks. Use a small pair of scissors or a stainless steel straw to cut circles out.

1. Beat butter with an electric mixer until pale and creamy.
2. Reduce speed to low and add icing sugar, and mix until combined.
3. Add cream and vanilla extract.
4. Split icing into several small bowls, adding varying amounts of cocoa powder to some and cinnamon to others, or a mix of both.
5. Spread over patty cakes and add the little liquorice face details. Use a fork to create different hair styles for each face.

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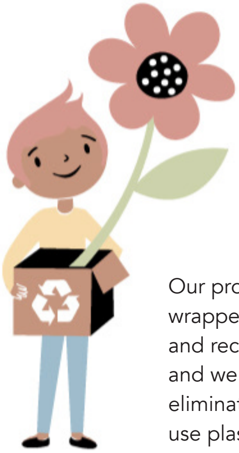

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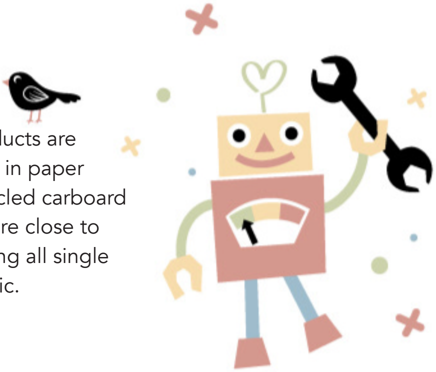

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yo!

yo-yos!

Higuchi
Sakuya.

For a simple toy, the yo-yo has made quite an impact. There's almost no time period or part of the world untouched by its presence: yo-yos were played with by the ancient Egyptians, Greeks and Mayans; by soldiers on the battlefield of Waterloo, European royalty and American presidents. They have been featured on *The Simpsons*, formed a competitive sport and been taken by astronauts into outer space—twice. (If you're wondering, yes, they still work up there, although you need to provide the force that gravity would otherwise.)

The yo-yo's widespread popularity is indisputable, but its origins are somewhat mysterious. It may have come from China, or the Philippines, or Greece. No one can be sure! Nor are we sure whether it was an invention that bounced around from one place to another, or one that sprang up independently in different parts of the world. What we do know is that it's ancient: a number of artefacts dating back to around 500BC show yo-yos in use. Archaeological expeditions have discovered images of the toy drawn in Egyptian temples and painted onto Greek vases, while yo-yos are described in ancient texts as discs made of terracotta, wood and metal. The materials have been updated but that simple design has not changed much over the millennia: two discs, joined by a rod and tied to a piece of string, that bounce up and down on that tether and are spun to form various tricks.

While the toy itself hasn't changed, it has had different names. In English-speaking parts of the world, a yo-yo was once a 'bandelore', a 'whirligig' or a 'quiz'. In China, it was called a 'diablo'. Folks in France were big fans and gave the yo-yo several names, including 'incroyable', 'jou-jou' and 'l'émigrette'—a reference to the many people fleeing (emigrating) the country during its revolutionary years, apparently with their precious yo-yos in tow! Some accounts suggest the French used yo-yos as stress relievers during this tumultuous time—there are reports of condemned people bouncing them as a calming distraction on their walk to the guillotine. Even Napoleon and his soldiers were seen relaxing with yo-yos prior to the great battle of Waterloo—though perhaps they gave up the habit after that crushing defeat.

The name 'yo-yo', however, is the one that has universally stuck, and it's most likely traced back to the Philippines, derived from the word yóyo—meaning to 'come back'—in the native language of the Ilocano people. (One historical myth dating back to the 16th century suggests the yo-yo originated when Filipino hunters climbed trees and threw rocks tied to long ropes at wild animals below, being able to easily retrieve the weapon for future attempts. While it's a similar mechanical idea, historians say there's no evidence that it inspired the toy—or the other way around, for that matter.)

We do know that the yo-yo was a popular toy in India in the mid-1700s, and by the end of the 18th century it had made its way to Europe, where it became a favourite among the upper classes of Scotland, England and France. This aristocratic endorsement was partly thanks to royalty's interest in the toy: a painting of King Louis XVII as a child showed him playing with a yo-yo, while a 1791 print of a yo-yo in the hand of the future king, a young George IV, helped popularise the toy in England and saw it briefly known as 'the Prince of Wales toy'.

It wasn't until 1866 that we saw the yo-yo's first recorded mention in America, and it was here that it really hit the bigtime. In the 1920s, a Filipino American named Pedro Flores started manufacturing yo-yos in California and showing off his product on the streets of San Francisco. An American businessman, Donald Duncan, saw Flores in action and promptly bought the company, soon making the 'Duncan' brand synonymous with yo-yos.

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(Literally—he trademarked the word ‘yo-yo’!) To help boost sales, Duncan sent a professional yo-yo touring group around the country, putting on performances and trick demonstrations for live crowds and television programs, turning a novelty into a bona fide fad. Factories were soon pumping out yo-yos by the thousands, making them a global phenomenon—but not everyone embraced the new trend.

In the 1930s, the Prime Minister of Syria banned the toys after religious leaders complained they were to blame for a crippling drought. (It was thought that the “up-and-down movement” of the toys was counteracting prayers for rain—though newspaper reports at the time noted that “London is full of yo-yos and it rains all the time”.)

By the 1960s, yo-yos were so ubiquitous that a judge ruled that the term ‘yo-yo’ was a part of common speech and couldn’t be trademarked—a move that ultimately put Duncan’s company out of business. Dozens of variations on the standard yo-yo design emerged, and companies engineered their own high-tech mechanisms to get the edge on other brands. They boasted features like ‘friction-reducing ball bearings’ or a ‘centrifugal clutch’, which made performing ever-more impressive tricks possible. Playing with yo-yos quickly went from popular pastime to international sport. One major contest in 1964 included an all-expenses-paid trip to Disneyland for competitors and their families, and the winners received a $5,000 college scholarship—a huge amount of money by the standards of the time.

Yo-yo crazes have come and gone in the decades since, but it seems that every generation of children is introduced to this perennial toy at some point. They learn the same thing their parents did: that a yo-yo is a pocket-sized treasure that can be enjoyed virtually anywhere, anytime … that it’s a bouncing wheel of joy at your fingertips.

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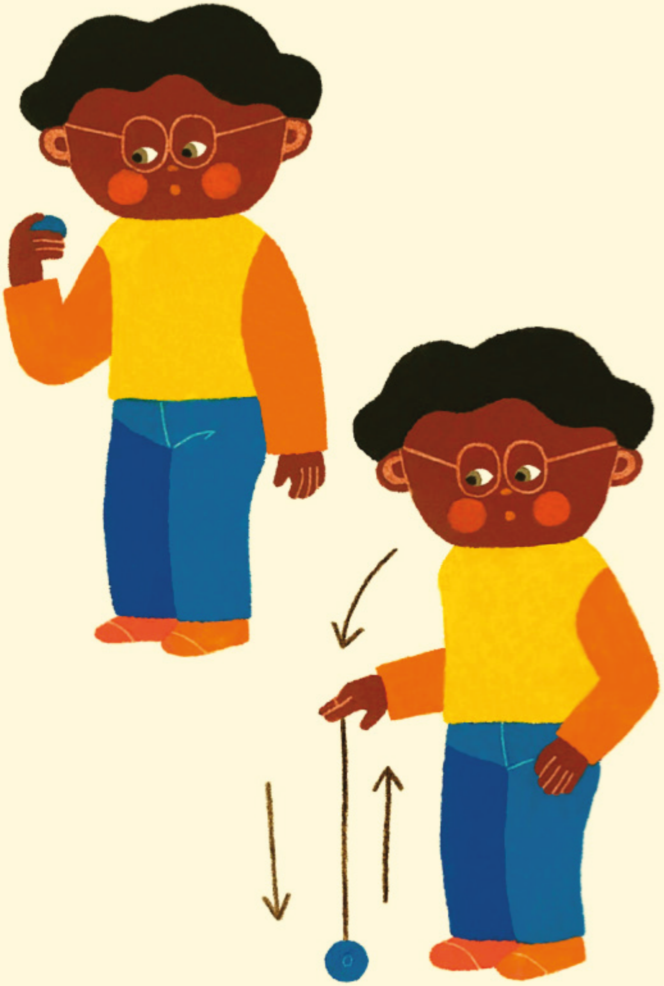
To assemble the Yo-Yo Tricks book: Cut along the black lines. Fold along the white lines. Using the page numbers, pop the pages in order. Staple or stitch together on the white line.

LUNCH LADY

Yo-Yo Tricks!

The Beginners Guide



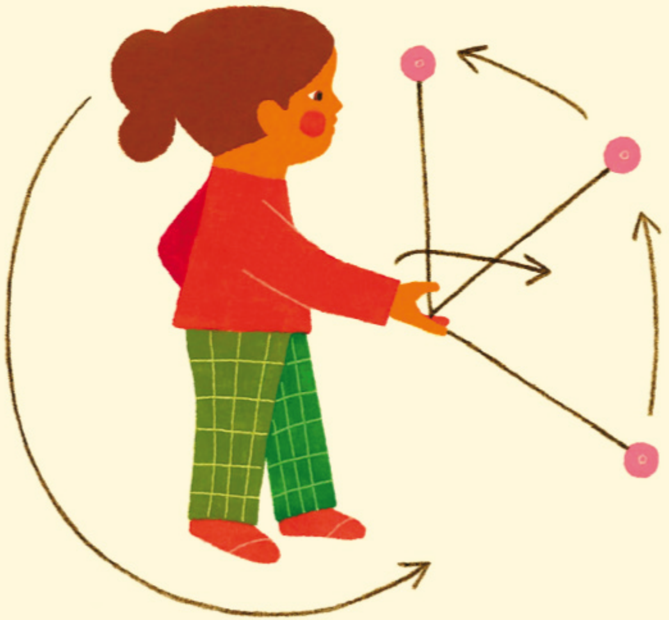
Around The World

Taking your yo-yo on a trip around the world combines two tricks: the Sleeper and the Forward Pass. But before you begin attempting this trip, make sure you don't have anyone or thing nearby—you don't want to hit another person, wall, ceiling or object! You also want to ensure the string isn't frayed and close to snapping.

Throw a Forward Pass to begin. But instead of jerking the yo-yo back when it reaches the end of the string, swing the yo-yo over your yo-yo shoulder and behind your back. The yo-yo should stay at the end of the string spinning while it makes a 360-degree arc.

Once you've completed your arc and the yo-yo is back in front of you, jerk the string and return the yo-yo to your hand.

To assemble the Yo-Yo Tricks book: Cut along the black lines. Fold along the white lines. Using the page numbers, pop the pages in order. Staple or stitch together on the white line.



The Throw Down

This trick is the starting step for many yo-yo manoeuvres, so it's one you'll want to master. Don't worry if you don't get it right the first time. It takes practice.

To begin, loop the string around your finger and face your hand palm-side up and stand the yo-yo between your thumb and middle finger. The yo-yo should be on its edge, in line with your shoulder. The string should curl up and over the top of the yo-yo so it can drop out in front of you.

Next, use a strong flick of the wrist to whip the yo-yo towards the ground. This motion is firm. The trick lies in throwing the yo-yo straight down without any sideways tilt.

When the yo-yo reaches the end of the string, you can pull it back up with a slight tug on the string.

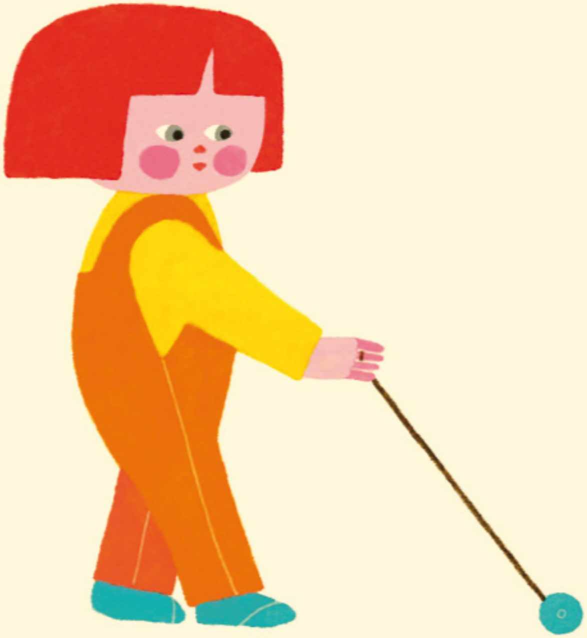
The Sleeper

The Sleeper uses the same technique as the Throw Down, but instead of returning home quickly, the yo-yo spins for a few seconds at the end of the string.

To begin, the initial motion is the same as the Throw Down. So, stand the yo-yo on its edge in the palm of your hand. The string should run over the top and front of the yo-yo.

With a strong overhand motion, flick the yo-yo sharply towards the ground. If the yo-yo has gone straight down without any sideways tilt, it should stay spinning on the end of the string.

While the yo-yo spins, turn your hand over, so your palm is now facing downwards. The yo-yo should remain spinning at the end of the string for a few seconds. To return the yo-yo to your hand, give the string a jerk.



To assemble the Yo-Yo Tricks book: Cut along the black lines. Fold along the white lines. Using the page numbers, pop the pages in order. Staple or stitch together on the white line.

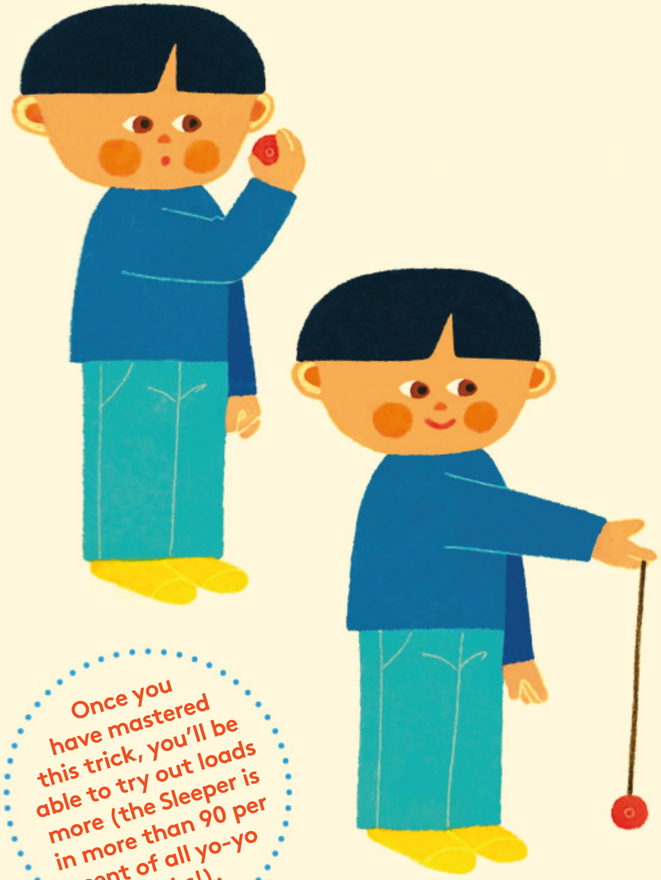
Walk the Dog

Walk the Dog uses the same technique as the Sleeper, but instead of allowing the yo-yo to spin on the end of the string, you take it for a gentle 'walk' along the ground.

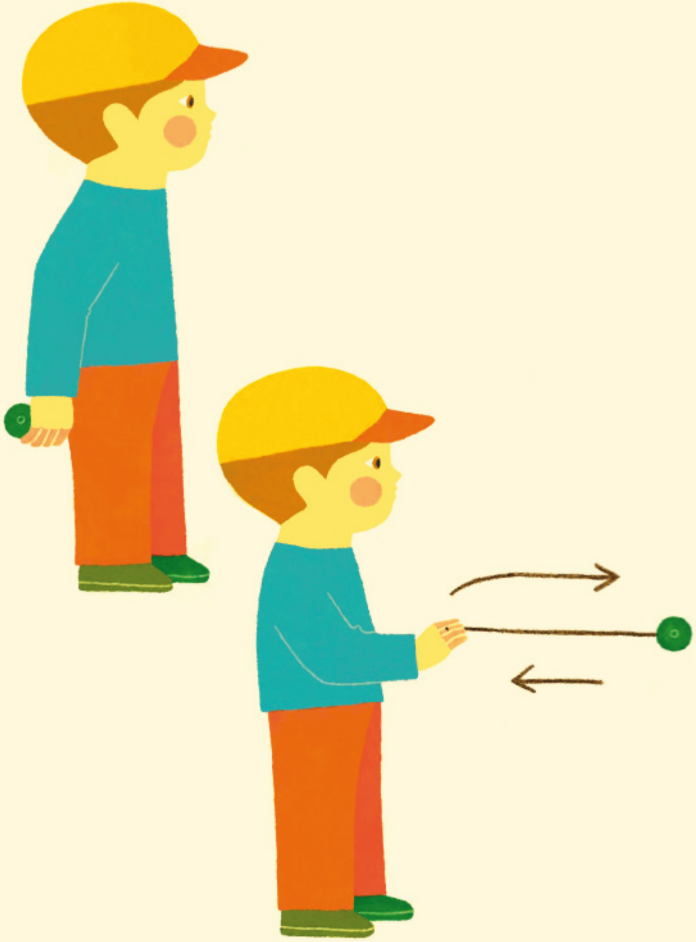
To begin, throw down a fast Sleeper and then set the yo-yo lightly on the ground. Let the yo-yo's spinning motion gently pull it along the ground like a dog on a lead.

When you're ready to return your 'doggie', give it a slight tug, and the yo-yo should return to your hand.

Getting the yo-yo to spin on the ground and 'walk' without snapping back can be tricky. Keep on practising. Also, try to perform this trick on smooth surfaces like a rug or carpet. Rough surfaces will damage the sides of the yo-yo.



Once you have mastered this trick, you'll be able to try out loads more (the Sleeper is in more than 90 per cent of all yo-yo tricks!).



The Forward Pass

Instead of throwing your yo-yo downwards, this trick aims for the yo-yo to move outwards horizontally.

Hold the yo-yo as if you are about to perform a Throw Down. But, instead of keeping your hand in front of you, drop your arm down to your side. Then, turn your hand over, so the back of your hand faces forwards.

Flick the yo-yo forwards, throwing the yo-yo directly out in front of you.

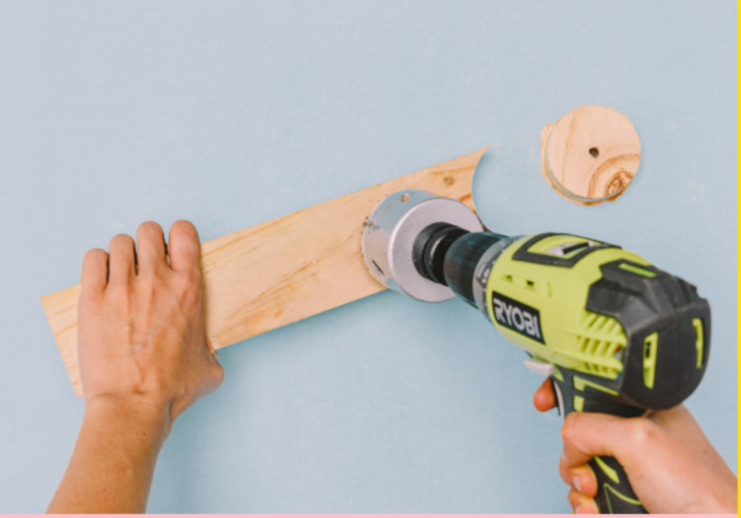
When the yo-yo reaches the end of the string, tug at it. Then, turn your hand over, so your palm faces up, and catch the yo-yo.

It might take a bit of practice to catch the yo-yo, but your technique is correct as long as it's hitting your hand on the return.

diy wooden yo-yo

You will need:

- 1.9cm thick plywood or pine timber
- power drill
- 6.4cm hole saw with 0.6cm pilot bit
- sandpaper
- bakers twine or cotton yarn
- wood stain, optional
- markers or paint, optional
- decoration template found on page 095, optional
- paintbrush
- glue
- scissors
- 6mm dowel
- hacksaw
- pencil

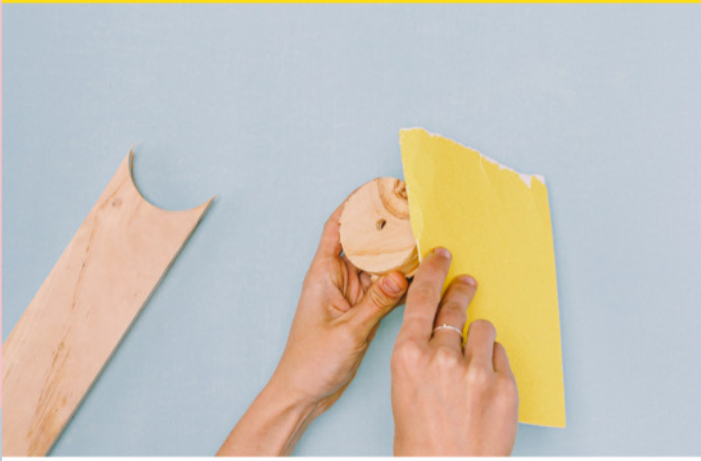


Step 1.

Using a drill, cut out 2 discs approximately 6.4cm in diameter from your plywood or pine. Avoid cutting out areas of the timber that have knots. If you don't have a hole saw bit, outline 65mm circles on the timber and use a jigsaw to cut them out. Find the centre of each circle and drill a hole. As always, use caution with power tools! Using a clamp and securing the timber to a flat surface before cutting is advised.

Step 2.

Using sandpaper, sand both discs until their edges are completely smooth.

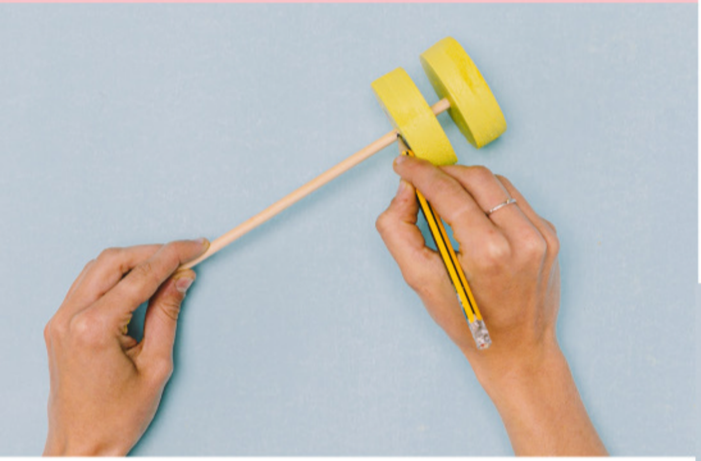


Step 3.

If you're going to paint your yo-yo, this is a good time to do it, while it's in pieces. You can use a wood oil to keep it natural, or paint it with acrylic paint. Allow to completely dry before the next step.

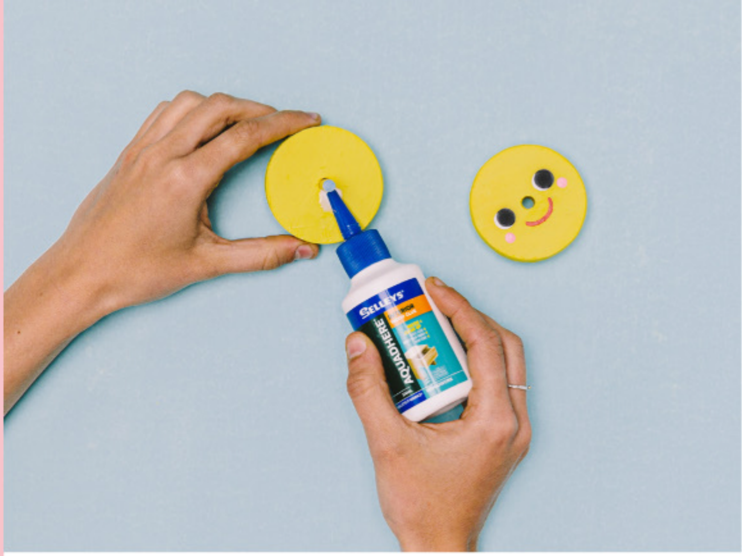
Step 4.

To assemble the yo-yo, slide the dowel through the holes on both discs so that the end of the dowel is flush with one of the discs and the other end of the dowel is sticking out of the other disc. Leave a 5mm space between both discs for the string. With a pencil, mark the end of the dowel that is poking out of the second disc. You will cut the dowel on this line so all edges will be flush.



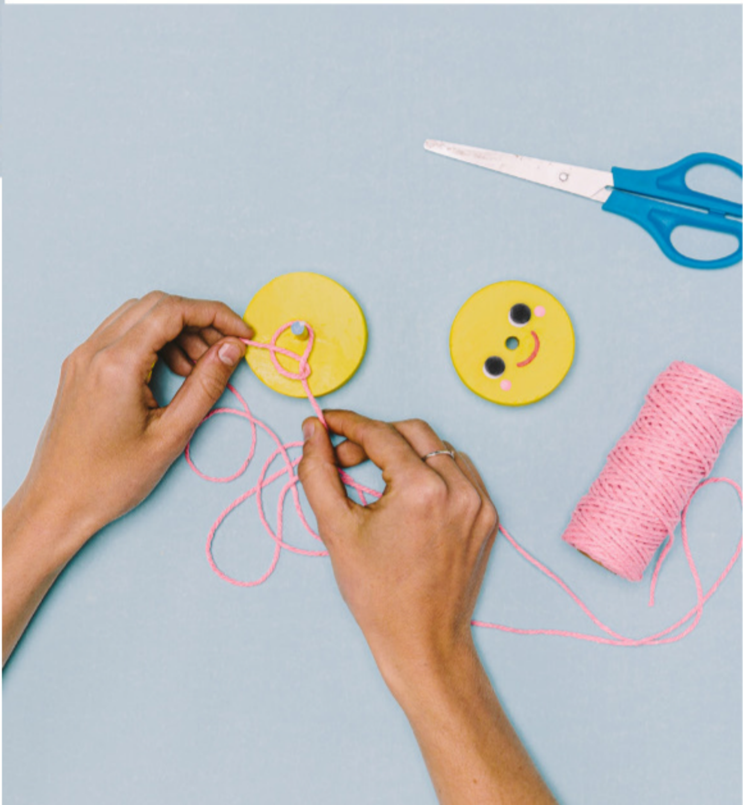
Step 5.

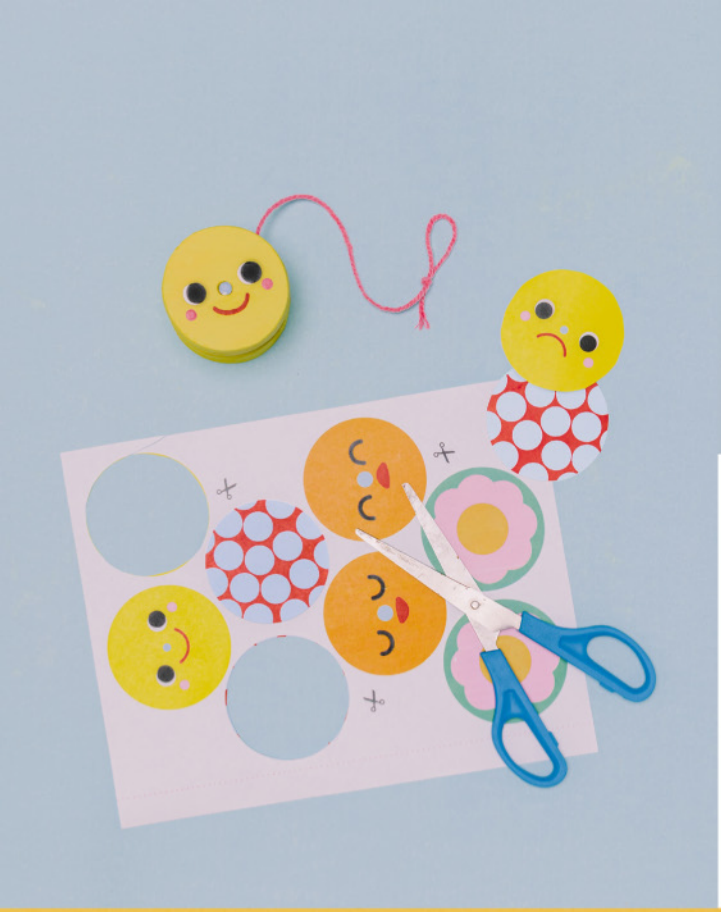
Slide the dowel out. Using a hacksaw, cut the dowel along the pencil line. You may need to sand the edges of the dowel to smooth them. Using a small amount of wood glue on the end of the dowel, slide it into the hole on the first disc and allow to dry.

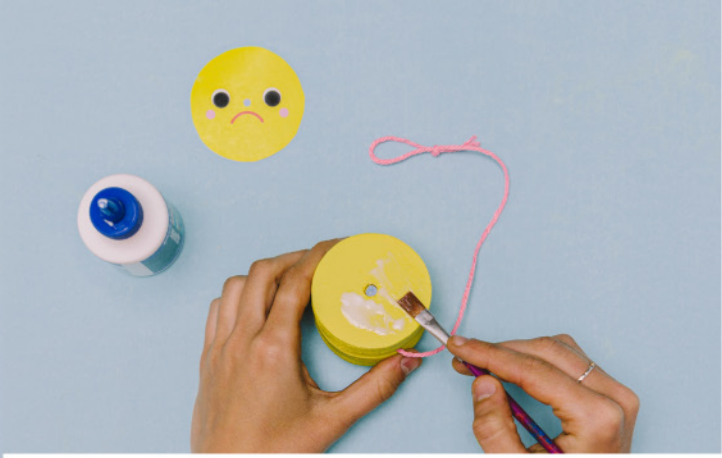


Step 6.

Time to attach the string to the yo-yo. Cut a length of string equal to the length between your waist and the floor. Then tie one end loosely to the dowel, and make a slip knot at the other end. This will be able to be adjusted to fit all finger sizes. >>





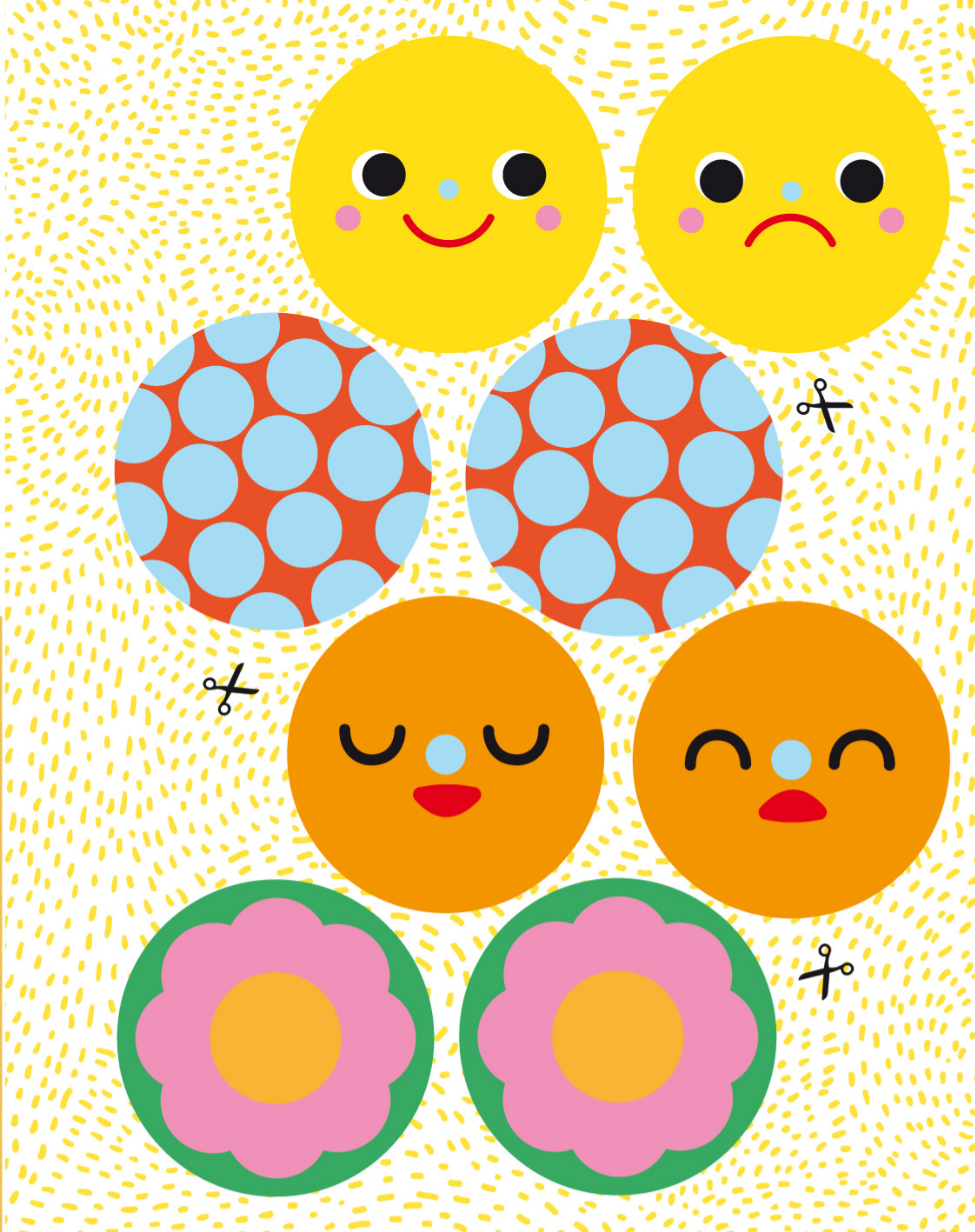


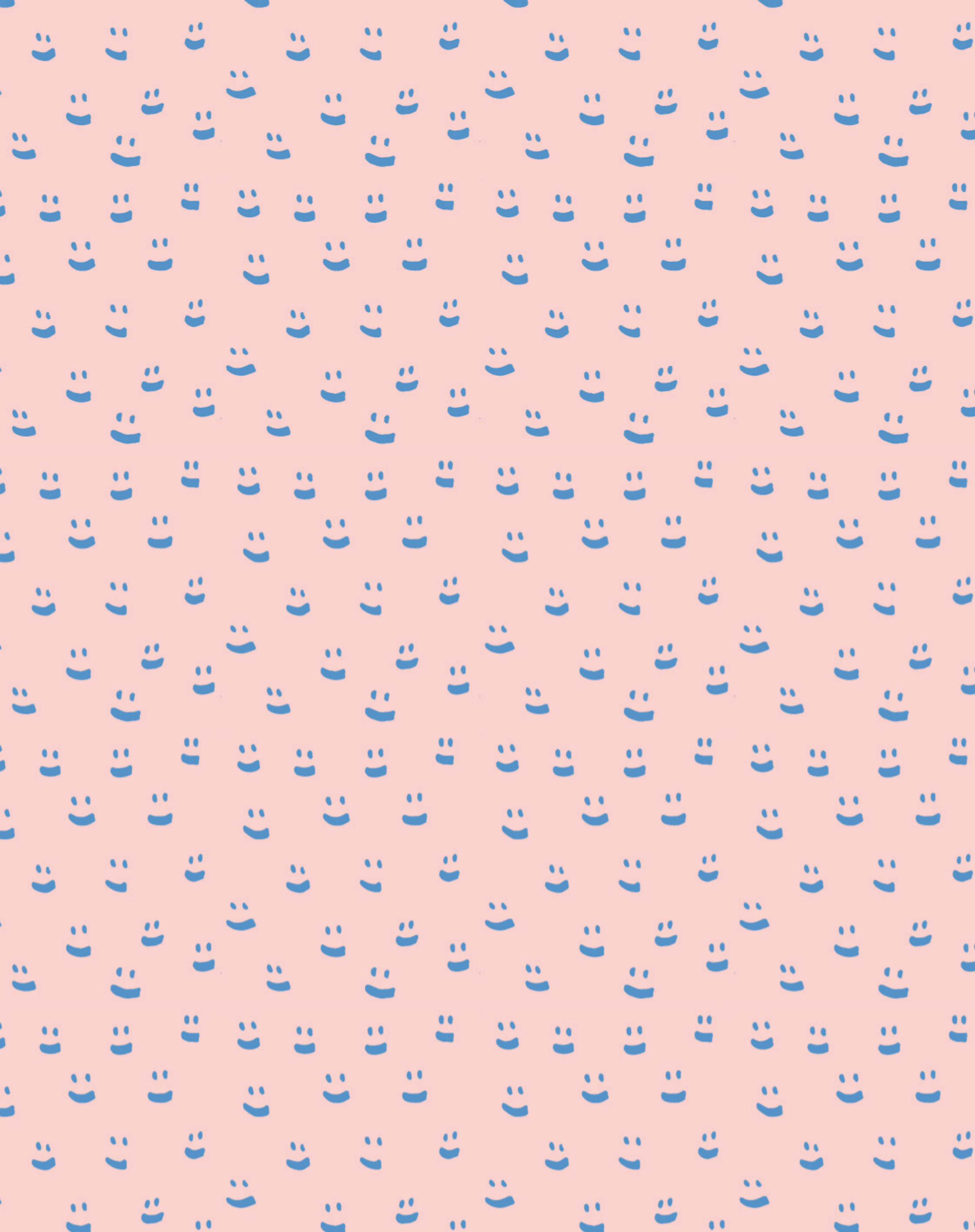
Step 7.

Once the string is tied, add some glue to the end of the dowel and slide the second disc on, keeping the edges flush, and allow to dry. If you want to use the paper decorating discs supplied on page 095, simply cut these out and glue them on to the outer sides of your yo-yo.

Step 8.

Wind up your yo-yo and start practising!





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yo-yo biscuits

(Makes 15)

For the biscuits

- 190g / 6.7oz butter, softened
- 1/3 cup icing sugar, sifted
- 1 tsp vanilla essence
- 1 1/2 cups plain flour
- 1/3 cup custard powder

For the filling

- 1/2 cup icing sugar, sifted
- 2 tbsp butter, softened

1. Line 2 large baking trays with baking paper and preheat the oven to 180°C / 350°F / Gas Mark 4.

2. Beat the butter, icing sugar, vanilla essence, flour and custard powder in an electric mixer. Once the mixture comes together in a ball of smooth dough, roll out into 30 balls, placing on the baking trays as you go. Once completed, use a fork to squish each ball into a disc, leaving the iconic prong marks on the surface.

3. Bake in the oven for 10–15 minutes until cooked completely but not coloured.

4. Leave to cool completely.

5. Make the filling by beating butter and sugar together in an electric mixer until smooth.

6. Once the biscuits are cool, place a spoonful of the mixture on the smooth side of one biscuit and place another on top to sandwich together. Repeat until all the biscuits are assembled.

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BOBO C

CHOSES

the musical child

Joan Koenig has spent a lifetime playing and teaching music. She wants the world to know that musical exposure can set a child up for wonderful things, and it begins by just having fun.

Higuchi
Sakuya

Tell us about yourself and your work.

I was born in the US but lived in France for forty-one years. I ventured into music at a very early age at my own request. My parents were not musicians but were very supportive. There was a piano in my home, and I asked for lessons at age five. I learnt from a neighbourhood teacher who was kind and encouraging, and when I came home, I would start improvising. I would listen to songs on the radio and try to reproduce them on the piano. Retrospectively, I realise a child is exercising creative problem-solving skills when they do that.

When I was eight, I asked to play the flute because I wanted to play in an orchestra. Little by little, I kept moving more seriously towards music until I eventually went to an international arts camp in Michigan that young musicians from all over the world came to. I was shocked because the kids were all so good. I realised I was lagging in piano. It might not sound nice, but if you're not playing a Mozart concerto on the piano by age twelve, there is no way you can make it in the very competitive world of classical music. So, at age sixteen, I realised it was too late for me on the piano. But you can't start the flute as early because your body isn't ready. I had always wanted to be a musician, so I decided to work harder and focus on the flute.

I practised three hours a day and auditioned for all the great schools. I got into one of the best schools in the US, the Juilliard School, and met a well-known French flautist, Jean-Pierre Rampal. I then moved to France to play at one of their incredible flute schools. I just loved France—the food, the language and the flute. It was easy at that time to earn quite a good living from playing music in France, so little by little, I got stuck and stayed. And then, I started my preschool, kindergarten and music school—L'Ecole Koenig—back in 1986.

Why did you write *The Musical Child*?

I was invited to a seminar in Salzburg, Austria. There were twenty creatives and twenty scientists. And I was there to talk about my research into music with very young children.

I discovered there's an entire body of research about how music affects children's mental and physical development. And I realised that what I was doing was intuitively on the right track, but it made me want to go further. So, I began reading and experimenting. For example, I read about a child's ability to distinguish the syllables in a word. When they can't do it, it leads to dyslexia, but one of the remedies is rhythm training. So I thought, Let's do rhythm training with words before children have a problem. At the time, this information was only available in research papers, but I thought all parents, caretakers and teachers should have easy access to this knowledge. So, I wrote my book.

What age group do you focus on?

In the past ten years, I've begun focusing on children under the age of seven. There is little doubt in neuroscience that the brain undergoes a period of plasticity from a little before birth until the age of six or seven. And then things stabilise more. But those first six years are vital. And while their brains are developing, children are also pruning out non-essential information to survive—this happens from only twelve months of age.

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It's incredibly exciting that very basic early music intervention can significantly affect children's language skills and attention. I think we should use music as preventative medicine—something to give your child a better start.

Higuchi Sakuya

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For example, if a child hears three languages from birth, the brain keeps those channels open. If one of those languages disappears and it only comes back at the age of seven, it will be much harder for the child to retain. And let's look at dramatic examples of a child who doesn't speak by seven, like a child who was lost in the woods. It's almost impossible for language to develop fully because the plasticity in the brain is no longer there, and language acquisition starts before twelve months.

What other benefits does music provide young children?

The links between music and language are the big benefit. Even our first communication with babies is musical—that baby voice people use is very sing-song. And we use that tone because it attracts the child's attention much more than a flat voice.

There's a scientist I adore called Ani Patel, and I mention his OPERA hypothesis in my book. He says the brain's circuitry between music and language is parallel, but music requires more precision than speech, and musical training can improve speech.

But there are other benefits too. Children learn to control themselves—to wait, read other people for emotional cues and listen. You don't have to force children to listen to one another when they're making music. They do it automatically because it's like a force field around them. Music can also help neurodiverse children or people with a stutter.

It's incredibly exciting that very basic early music intervention can significantly affect children's language skills and attention. I think we should use music as preventative medicine—something to give your child a better start. There are also studies into the adult brain function of musicians, especially in later life. And they're realising that musicians' brains age better and retain more function.

How does music help children develop traits like empathy, intuition or resilience?

I think these are the most important factors! And the intuition part is very mysterious. Let me give you an example.

We play a simple game with babies. The baby stands in their parent's arms, and we're dancing, and they have little shakers. And the song is very simple: "I'm going to shake, shake, shake, shake, shake and stop."

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> If we can create an environment where young people love being with you because they're having fun, you'll have better relationships when your children are adolescents. Enjoying music and being creative together is a big part of fostering that kind of relationship. You will never regret taking the time to have fun.

<<

And you stop. We stop for a fixed period in the beginning because we're teaching the rhythm. But soon afterwards, we change, and the stop isn't for a fixed period. And in that pause, you find the babies staring at you, waiting for something that will show them when to use the shaker again—they're looking for a tiny bit of movement in my arms that indicates when to start again. And they're spot on.

The reason they do it is because they're doing it all together. And it's kind of exciting when everybody's shaking, and then everybody stops; the silence is very appealing. And you see these big smiles. So, they're training themselves to read the person leading, to see when it's going to start again—it's training in observing another person.

The ultimate version of this is when you're playing in a string quartet. There's this mysterious moment when you're placing the last note, and everybody's looking at each other, and it's magical. They place at the same time, but there's no rule. You're out of the rhythmic construction. It's marking the end of the piece, and everybody is looking at each other and practically breathing together. It's this breathing together that children learn to look at and observe. And what happens afterwards can feel almost like mind reading.

As for resilience: that's to do with creative problem-solving and perseverance—something musicians have to do well. Also, I think if you're playing a Mozart concerto in your teen years, many other things will feel easy. Music is so demanding in so many areas that even learning another language can feel easy. But the best part is that although music is very involved and complicated, it feels easy because children enjoy it so much.

How can parents bring music into their children's lives?

It's all in my book and on my website, but beyond that, parents should play music they love in the house. It can be any music, but there are wonderful benefits from just singing and clapping your hands together or banging on pots and pans.

> There's a scientific consensus that all humans have language acquisition pre-established in their brains. Scientists are reluctant to say we're a musical species, but I think they will in the near future. The fact that music is practised all over the world—this is language to me—indicates that, yes, we are a musical species.

You can also find a good musical program that involves children making music together. Music is a social event. Don't get them a private tutor—that has no meaning or social activity. But put a ten-year-old in a rock band? That's an incredible thing.

Are all kids musical?

There are always children who are more attracted to certain things. The question of talent always amuses me because I think: Do we like something because we're good at it, or are we good at it because we like it and do it so often? I don't know the answer.

I think some people have a good ear that can hear melody and reproduce it, and I can do that. But I was also sitting at the piano at age five trying to play melodies from the radio, so I was basically training my ear.

But there's a scientific consensus that all humans have language acquisition pre-established in their brains. Scientists are reluctant to say we're a musical species, but I think they will in the near future. The fact that music is practised all over the world—this is language to me—indicates that, yes, we are a musical species.

Does music help with behaviour?

Absolutely. You can sing songs about packing away, putting shoes on and all sorts of commands, and young children will obey without even thinking. Music creates fewer disciplinary problems in the classroom.

But when children have behavioural disorders, it's generally for one of two reasons. Either their arousal level is too strong, or their arousal level is too low, and they're compensating. These temper tantrums can indicate that the child is fighting to rise to an appropriate arousal level, or they're so overstimulated and trying to shut everything out by screaming. If music is present in these situations, you can have both the soothing and arousal aspects, depending on what needs to happen. And the reason this works is because music is actually vibration, and our brains are made up of vibrations and sound waves.

What do you want parents to know?

If children in Australia go to school before six, teachers should be aware of the links between music and literacy. If parents have a choice about where they send their child to school, try to choose one with a music program. If there isn't one, you could rally some parents together and get enough support to create one. Children should have music exposure at least once a week.

Before starting school, daycares should involve music in a child's day-to-day, or if the child is at home, the parents or grandparents can do that.

Anything else?

I see a lot of pressure on parents to develop little geniuses. I think it's partly to do with social status and fear. People are afraid that if they don't give their children the most brilliant start and get them into the best schools, their children won't have good jobs and meaningful lives. But parents need to remember it's about the journey, not the goal, and the journey should be enjoyed. If we can create an environment where young people love being with you because they're having fun, you'll have better relationships when your children are adolescents. They'll also be more likely to toe the line because they won't want to lose the connection you have. Enjoying music and being creative together is a big part of fostering that kind of relationship. You will never regret taking the time to have fun.

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the toy maker

Casiana Monczar believes open play encourages children to become more independent. So, she designs toys which inspire storytelling and ignite creativity.

Who is in your family?

We are a family of four. There's me, my husband, Jordi, and our children Lola, (13) and Tomàs (9)—plus a few more little ones we lost to miscarriages, who still have a place in our hearts.

Can you tell us a little about yourself?

Speaking about myself is the hardest thing to do. I can say: Hello, I am Casiana—a woman, mother and wife. Deep down, I'm a loner but I'm always surrounded by people. And I love wood, autumn and the colour yellow.

Where do you live?

We live in Cabanes, a little countryside village in the north of Catalunya, Spain.

Have you always lived there?

I was born in Argentina. When I was around twenty, I travelled around Europe for almost a year. I lived in Berlin for a while and ended up living in Barcelona, where I stayed for more than fifteen years. At some point, my family and I decided it was time to leave the city and this coincided with the inheritance of a home in the countryside, where we currently live.

How is your life different now that you've moved?

It's totally different. Sharing life with nature is a powerful change. At first, it seemed easy and beautiful—wildflowers blowing around and beautiful trees. But for me, the real catharsis was the connection with the deep silence and true darkness—something I had never experienced before living in cities.

Do you parent differently from how you were raised?

Totally, but I am absolutely grateful to my parents, without whom I would not be who I am today. I was born in Buenos Aires, which is a huge city. I have distant memories of my childhood, but I especially remember restrictive limits imposed by my environment and very strict rules—maybe as a counter-reaction. I think this is why people now say that I am an "alma libre" (free soul).

What kinds of toys did you play with as a child?

I remember a lot of books around me and one doll. I also used to spend a lot of time outside in the garden. Grapat is perhaps the result of the lack of play during my own childhood.

Why did you start Grapat?

When our eldest, Lola, was born, we experienced a big wake-up call observing her playing. She never wanted to play with the toys someone had gifted her. Instead, she preferred the pots from the kitchen, my scarves and the books in the library. At that point, we completely removed the toys from her reach and she grew up through her early childhood without them. Startled by how she would play with everyday materials, we realised that something had to change. This is the originating idea of Grapat, but it took us more than five years to materialise it.

What kind of toys do you make?

Open, open, open! Which means freedom at the end of the day. Our toys are made from wood—it is our element. It is soft and robust. At the same time, it is noble and simple. It smells and sounds good. The surface of the wood absorbs the dyes so well, keeping the beautiful veneers that make each piece unique. We also love that over time, the pieces acquire gentle dents and scratches, telling the stories of all the playtimes they share generation after generation.

>>

RADIGUER

Sandra Petrignani
Catálogo de juguetes
The Children's Forest
hugging, raspberry jellies + friendly fungi

I can't go to bed without learning something new every day. This is my commitment to myself.

<<

What’s unique about these toys?

We aim to offer the tools for children to create their own stories. The extreme simplicity, the usability, the quality, the deep concept endowed in each piece is what I think makes them unique.

Our toys are all about a lack of information—less information and fewer details to avoid invading the child’s capabilities, allowing them to apply information to the object. Putting the pieces at their service. If the child needs to express ‘brother’, she can do so with the same piece that she can express ‘sword’. We trust that a connected kid is a free kid. And a free childhood will make the world a beautiful place to live in.

What would you like parents to know about open-ended play?

Open-ended play is a way to say that we respect our little ones. Toys with a lot of information are saying to the child: you do not know enough, you need me (the adult), I know more (the adult).

Toys that are open enough allow children to transform the object into whatever they need. In that way, they become the boss in their play, and we are only their assistants. Offer them the highest possible simplicity that will allow them to transcend the toy and go on their own path.

Too much information weakens children. In open-ended play, there are no rules, no one-way to play, and the best thing about this idea is that judgment does not intervene. And when I say judgment, I mean the negative one: “That's not correct; this piece is yellow and needs to be in the group of the yellows.” As well as positive judgement: “What a beautiful elephant!”. The positive judgment is as negative as the negative. With loose parts and open-ended toys, judgement is not involved at all.

What inspires you?

I can explain what inspires me in one image: I see a child of around three years old first meeting with a natural element—an acorn, a stick or a handful of sand. How her body interacts, which actions she develops, how she keeps the piece in her hands ... this first encounter between a child and a gift from nature is my greatest source of inspiration.

What’s your creative process like for designing a new toy?

First, ideas appear when I’m observing my environment and trying to imagine the transformation of everyday objects into possible play objects. Most of the time, said objects are natural ones. Once an idea sinks in my head, it needs a lot of time to mature inside of me—I collect this piece and look for more similar ones to compare it to. If we speak about an acorn, for example, I research a lot about its colours through the different stages of time. A piece included in a product launched this year was coloured similar to when acorns grow on the tree but haven’t fallen on the earth yet, with these fresh tones in between greens and purples. At some point, something inside me decides to go outside, and then my team starts working with me. I have a huge limitation when it comes to working on paper. That’s why I mould the first prototypes with beeswax or by carving potatoes. I cannot imagine the structure and proportions until I touch it.

How do you manage sustainability goals?

For us, sustainability is not a marketing tool. It’s a must-have in life. There is no other way. In our case it is quite easy because our raw materials come from nature, and we don’t use plastics, so in some ways, we do not need to make so much effort. Our wood indeed comes from sustainable forests and we are certified, which implies rigour around how and where our raw materials come from. But for us, being sustainable is much more. It also allows our team to take their children to and from school, accompanying them to the doctor and enjoying family weekends, for example. Sustainability is not only raw materials and production processes; it’s culture, people, and it is a way of life. We as a family only eat tomatoes when the plants of our local land offer them to us in summer—this is sustainability too.

Have they changed since starting out?

Yes, we are working all the time towards reducing the consumption of goods, which is the best way to be sustainable. This is why quality is our best practice.

Quality is a form of respect for the client, but mainly a form of respect for Mother Earth. Higher quality, less waste, less use of natural resources, long life to our land!

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We made a process of eliminating 100 per cent of plastic use in 2019, and we also are working hard to change the types of wood we use to other ones that generate less waste. Waste management is another big thing for us—the scraps of wood are used as a heating source in winter.

What is Grapat's philosophy?

My leitmotif is working for a free childhood through open-ended play and with unstructured materials. This place of freedom is where children can always be connected with their inner desire. If children can inhabit this deep territory of connection, then they can be who they really are and not who we others expect them to be. Be free, play open!

How does your family juggle the work/parenting balance?

When we say Grapat is a family project, it is 100 per cent true. We are all involved in decisions: kids to their level, we as adults to ours. The four of us are Grapat, and Grapat is part of us. Lola feels enthusiastic when she helps me to find a perfect green tone, and Tomás when he finds a good way of building with screws. This is all a mix; this is a holistic project.

What are you passionate about?

I love my work! And I feel passionate about the link between childhood and play! Oh, and colour! It is something that makes me feel obsessed.

Do the seasons inspire you and your work?

Of course. But also all of the intermediate changes that occur within and between them! I went through a time of deep and detailed observation. Tomatoes are not the same when summer starts compared to when summer ends! Nature is the real clock in our family. We live according to seasons, not only going to the beach in summer but also going to sleep at 8pm when it is winter or staying in when the Tramontana wind decides to blow. It feels a bit like an endless dance when you submit yourself to nature and understand that there is nothing higher that reigns over us and accompanies us through life. We also work according to nature. When we started, we used to say that lead times for orders would depend on how nature decided to behave. For example, with Tramontana blowing, some pieces cannot be stained.

Have you learnt anything about yourself from your business?

Being a mother and running a company taught me that expectations lead us to nothing but unhappiness. Accepting (not resigning) is the greatest learning. People who love me say that "everything itches" about me or that I'm always hungry for more. By this, they mean I can't go to bed without learning something new every day. This is my commitment to myself.

What are your hopes for the future?

My dream is to never lose my hunger and enthusiasm and to never run out of ideas (creatives seem to have this fear). My dream for Grapat is to be able to keep growing organically as we are growing now.

Anything else?

I would like to share a simple metaphor that is very effective to express my point of view on how we adults should accompany children through their growth in a respectful way. I see childhood as a plant; just like plants, kids do not need us to tell them how to grow. Isn't it true that it would never occur for us to say to a plant: "It's springtime. Now you must BE a more lively green!" Maybe the plant needs to be repotted because it has already outgrown its container, perhaps some of its leaves need to be trimmed as they've become rotten, or maybe we need to find another window because it needs more sun. A child is just like a plant: all they need is fertile soil, water and sun!

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Nature is the real clock in our family. We live according to seasons, not only going to the beach in summer but also going to sleep at 8pm when it is winter or staying in when the Tramontana wind decides to blow. It feels a bit like an endless dance when you submit yourself to nature and understand that there is nothing higher that reigns over us and accompanies us through life.

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Let's Talk

About Sex.

Cory Silverberg is a sex educator who wants to expand our definition of sex and gender, and the conversations we have about it.

Tell us a little about yourself.

I live in Toronto, Canada, with my partner and child, who is eight years old. My professional background is in psychology, but I found that education was much better suited to my personality because I talk a lot—which isn't as good for therapists. So, I've been a sex educator for over twenty years. I write books for young people, and I talk with parents, youth, teachers and librarians—trying to get them thinking about 'sex' and 'gender' in a bigger way.

What was your upbringing like?

In some ways, it was very typical, and in others, it was not. I grew up in a middle-class white Jewish household and community in Toronto in the '70s. My grandparents were immigrants, and my parents were born in Canada. I was surrounded by kids who were similar to me in many ways.

The less typical thing was that my father was a family doctor who became a sex therapist around the time I was born. And my mother was a children's librarian, which is probably more typical, but the combination was an interesting one.

I grew up in a household where sex was talked about. It was the '70s, so this wasn't entirely uncommon, and it was a time when gender norms were bending—many men had long hair and purses, and more women were working and living independently. Some boundaries were being pushed, but it was still quite limited compared to life now.

Do you parent differently from how you were raised?

I'm paying more attention. I love my parents very much—my mother has passed away and my father is still alive. But as parents of the '70s, they weren't active in the ways many parents are now. I always had food on the table, got to school, and someone knew where I was. But you were kind of left to figure stuff out on your own. And as a child, I didn't understand I was genderqueer. I knew I didn't fit in, but I didn't want to talk about that. If I had gone to my parents and said I was having problems, they probably would have listened, but my feeling was: Oh, I'm supposed to figure stuff out for myself.

In comparison, I would describe myself as an overly involved parent. And it's not just that we talk about sex in our household; we talk about feelings, friendship, what the truth is and how hard it can be to move through the world sometimes. And on that topic, we talk about how we can care for ourselves and others when it feels hard.

The other difference is that I was raised in a traditional nuclear family with the understanding that everything stays inside the house. If you need help, it's your parents or maybe your grandparent. Whereas my kid has many other trusted adults in their life, and we are clear that we need lots of people to survive and thrive.

But of course, I'm missing stuff too. My grandparents were Holocaust survivors and had a lot of trauma, so I lived with intergenerational trauma. And I can see how my parents did their best to mess me up a little less than they were messed up, and my job is to do the same. I'm going to make mistakes—all parents do.

What is different about the sex education projects you work on?

I use the language of diversity, equity and inclusion to do sex education in a way that works, not just for kids with two parents, but for all children. I must think about how we can have conversations about where babies come from when there was an adoption, a single mother by choice, or they're part of a trans family. How do we do sex education in a way that isn't just for middle-class white kids?

To do that work, I need to retrain a lot of people. When I'm working with doctors, they think sex is female vaginal intercourse or two or three other things. But I explain sex is also crushes and romance, relationships and boundaries, as well as feelings and mental health. All of this stuff is part of sex.

Did your journey with gender influence the work you do?

Of course. I was a kid who didn't fit in and didn't know why. It would have been fine for me to be gay when I grew up, but I knew that wasn't me. And I didn't know about trans people—which was the only other language available in the '70s. We didn't have non-binary or genderqueer people because those words hadn't made their way into mainstream culture. And because I was different, I was treated differently—I was treated very badly by other kids and some teachers. Being different made life hard and I consider myself lucky to have survived, because it was not a good life when I was younger. There wasn't a lot of gender oppression in my household—I wasn't told not to cry or anything—but I did not have the language to figure out who I was. If I had learnt the word 'trans', I would have been curious, looked into what it meant and maybe learnt more. Language influences not just the way I write books, but also the point of the books, because to me, the point of our books is not to tell kids how to be. The point is to offer words and ideas and frameworks for conversations.

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How is sex defined in your books?

I define sex differently depending on the age group the book is being written for. But the most important thing I want everyone to know is that ‘sex’ is a word we made up, and then I usually describe three ways we use it.

Sex is a word we use to define bodies—so mostly, we talk about male and female bodies, but we also know there’s more than just male and female. And sex is also used to describe a thing we do—something we can do by ourselves or with other people to feel good or feel close to someone else. And the third thing is that there’s one kind of sex you can use to make babies.

Why do you think so many adults struggle to talk about sex with young people?

Because we had terrible sex education. Even though I grew up with sex education books, I didn’t have the opportunity to have the conversations I needed. None of us grew up with the education we deserved or needed. And then there’s this myth that once you’re eighteen, you don’t need sex education anymore—you’re an adult, and you’ll figure it out.

That’s when we often need the most help.

Exactly. Thankfully there are still opportunities for parents to learn how to have these conversations. There are organisations in Canada, and I assume Australia, that can provide support groups for parents. And we need to remember all parents go through this stage of needing to answer questions and not knowing how. But I think parents should look for opportunities to talk about it instead of waiting. For example, if you’re watching a movie with kissing or marriage, you can pause it and talk about it.

Your books have a strong theme of power and boundaries. What do you want youth to know about these topics?

Youth don’t have access to a lot of their rights, and their access to expressing power is limited. They don’t get to choose how they spend their time, what they wear, where they live or even some of their friendship groups. It can be frustrating as a young person. But I know parents are controlling these things with the hope of keeping children safe. The tricky thing is that we are raising kids without much opportunity to make choices or pay attention to their instincts. And then they go out into the world where there are tricky adults or peers that might take advantage and use their power in a bad way.

I want children to understand from a very early age that they have power even in constraints, and they can learn what it feels like to feel power and use it—hopefully with people rather than over them.

And this plays into boundaries; you can’t talk about sex education without talking about boundaries. Kids often learn to ignore their own boundaries. We say things like, “Don’t cry—shhh.” We teach children to ignore their responses when their boundaries are crossed.

But we also need to remember boundaries aren’t just what we don’t want; they’re also what we do want. And if the goal is to raise kids who will one day have sexual expression—whatever that looks like for them—we want them to be aware of their boundaries and how to communicate them. And the good news is, we can do that without talking about sex. Life is not always smooth, which can provide opportunities to discuss our boundaries.

Your book *You Know, Sex* took seven years to complete. What was the process like?

The process is the same for each book. I write a very rough draft that’s not very good. Then, Fiona Smith—my colleague, friend, co-author and illustrator—does the rough drawings. And then I take the draft around and talk to families. For *You Know, Sex*, I talked with almost a hundred families. I went to people’s homes, put it in front of them, and sat with my laptop and watched them read it—which is very interesting and informative. And then we’d talk. I’d ask lots of questions about which bits made sense and which bits didn’t, and what was missing. That process takes the longest but makes the book so much better.

I also work with professionals. In this book, there’s quite a long sexual safety section with a very involved part on childhood sexual abuse. The professionals I worked with gave me advice I think everyone should know. They said things like, “Try to make the character look less angry. Don’t make it scary. Don’t make it weird. Actually, make it look as regular as possible.” Which is so counterintuitive. Because, of course, it’s an awful thing, and I want to show that it’s not the same as pleasurable touch. But the professionals told me, “If you make it look scary, kids aren’t going to talk about it.” And the priority is getting kids to talk about it.

Has your approach to communicating sex education changed in the two decades you’ve been working in it?

Totally. Mainly because I have more Black colleagues now. Most of the people who initially trained me were white. I’m white. I grew up in a white neighbourhood, and there are all sorts of aspects of whiteness that permeated the way I worked.

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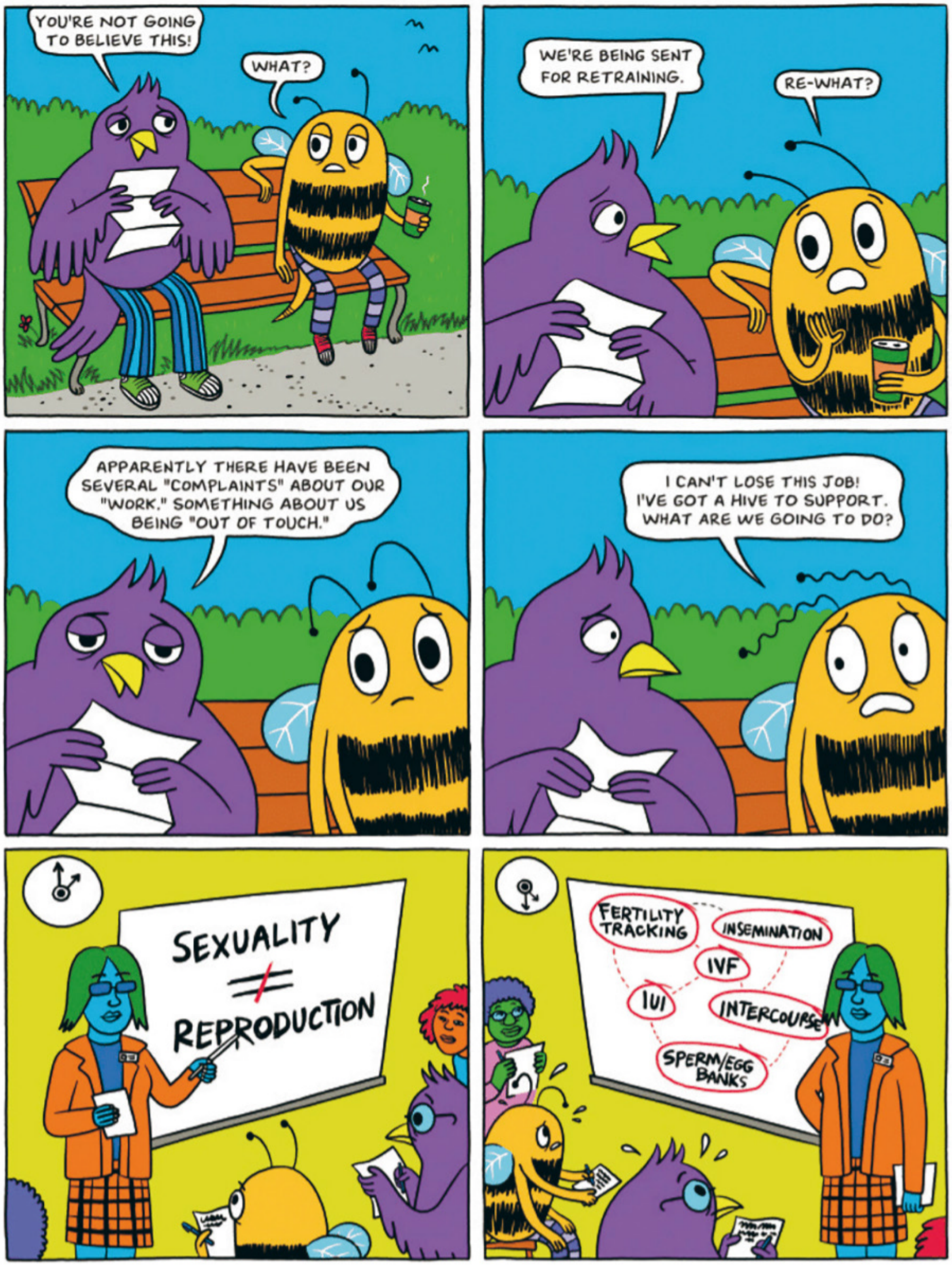
YOU'RE NOT GOING TO BELIEVE THIS!
WHAT?
WE'RE BEING SENT FOR RETRAINING.
RE-WHAT?
APPARENTLY THERE HAVE BEEN SEVERAL "COMPLAINTS" ABOUT OUR "WORK." SOMETHING ABOUT US BEING "OUT OF TOUCH."
I CAN'T LOSE THIS JOB! I'VE GOT A HIVE TO SUPPORT. WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?
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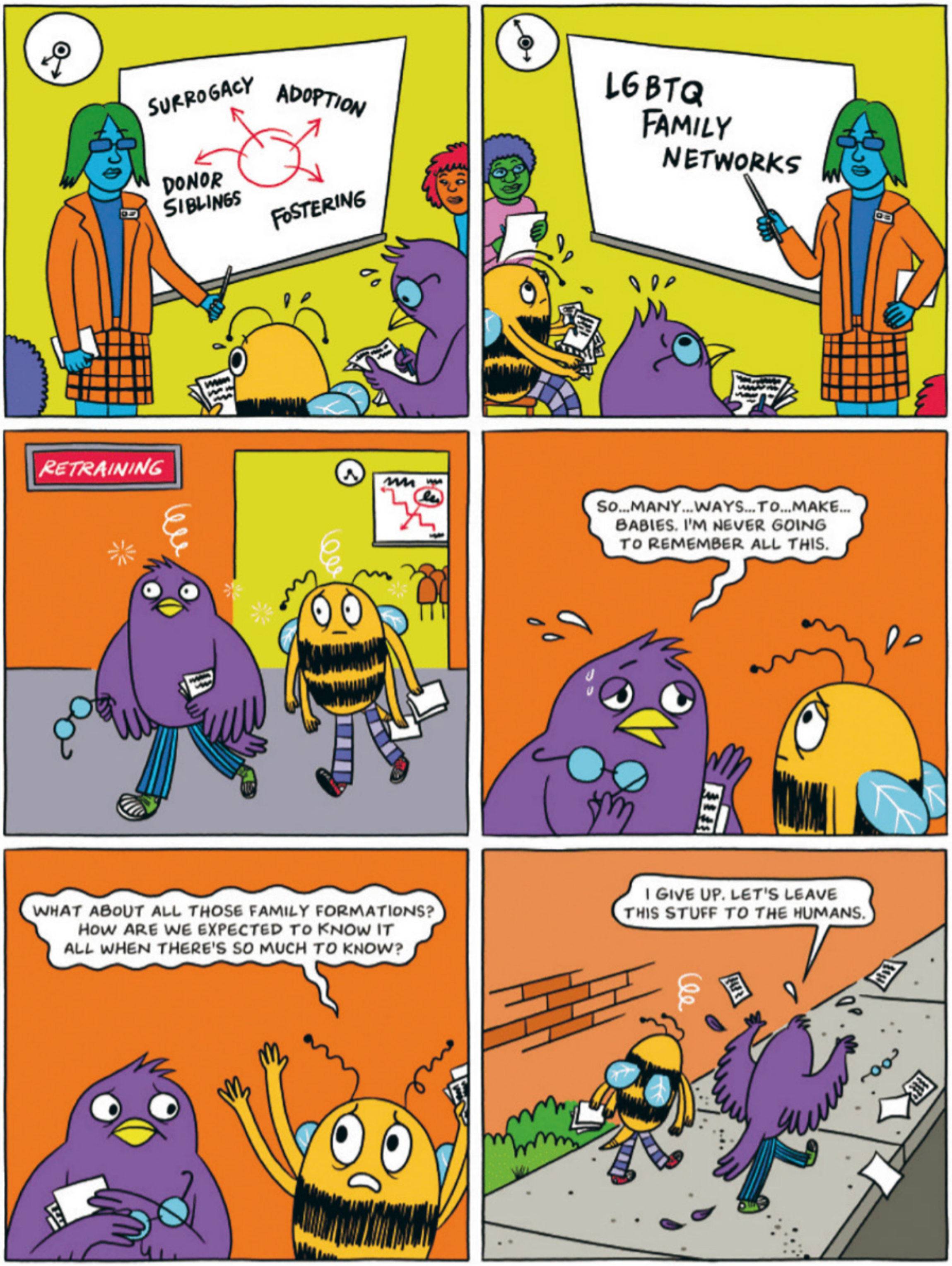
SURROGACY
ADOPTION
DONOR SIBLINGS
FOSTERING
LGBTQ FAMILY NETWORKS
RETRAINING
SO...MANY...WAYS...TO...MAKE... BABIES. I'M NEVER GOING TO REMEMBER ALL THIS.
WHAT ABOUT ALL THOSE FAMILY FORMATIONS? HOW ARE WE EXPECTED TO KNOW IT ALL WHEN THERE'S SO MUCH TO KNOW?
I GIVE UP. LET'S LEAVE THIS STUFF TO THE HUMANS.

WHAT MAKES A BABY, FROM THE BOOK *YOU KNOW, SEX* BY CORY SILVERBERG + FIONA SMYTH

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Disabled Black feminists are really the ones who taught me how to write in a way that welcomes people in without telling people who they are and doesn't ask people to be something in order to read our books. Lots of books have an approach that classifies: this is a book for gay people, this is a book for straight people. And that's not helpful, especially for kids. I'm much more aware of intersectionality and how to think through an intersectional lens. I've also had to get rid of some ideas about perfection I had, including the idea there is a right answer.

What have children taught you about talking about sex education?

I'm reminded that kids aren't adults, and kids haven't been sexually socialised yet. So, kids at every age have less shame than adults and are often more connected to their curiosity and have fewer pretences—they're more likely to ask questions with fewer filters.

I've also learnt from kids that they know this stuff is going on. Many of them are experiencing it and just want to talk about it. They don't want people tiptoeing around, and they don't want to feel like we are censoring a bunch of information. I think there's a big difference between curating and censoring. As adults, we are curating—and parents should check that a book, for example, is appropriate before they show it to their kids. But I've also learnt from kids that they can handle a lot. If it's communicated in a language they understand, they have the capacity to understand very complicated things—and that includes kids who are neurodiverse or have developmental disabilities.

Is there any overarching theme you want children to learn from your books?

There are a few. I want kids to know there's no right or wrong way to have a body, and all bodies are worthy and beautiful the way they are. I want them to know there's a future for them. None of us knows what it is yet because they are not going to be the same as us—they're going to be slightly different and will make their own type of family and community, and we're going to help them. I also want them to know they have options, and I want them to know how to keep themselves and others safe. And lastly, I want them to realise they already know a lot of what they need to know—they just might not have the words, and they might not yet know that sex is much bigger than they think it is.

What do you want adults to know?

I want adults to know they don't need to be experts. Our books can be very helpful, but actually, if they've survived into adulthood, they already know a lot. They know how to navigate relationships, and that might include divorces and broken friendships, which is important learning material. The main thing is being able to listen.

In my experience, parents and teachers often come to me because they're worried about saying the wrong thing. But if you have a kid in your life who you care for in some way—a niece or nephew, a child or a student—the fact you have that relationship with them is what makes you a really good person to be part of their sex education. Because we all play a role. Lots of kids don't want to talk to their parents about kissing or whatever, but they might be willing to talk to an aunty or someone else. We also need to understand that few of us can answer questions eloquently the first time, but there's always another opportunity. And sometimes, we just need to be honest and say, "I don't know", or, "That was a bad answer. Let me try again."

What are your hopes for the future?

I hope more of us learn to be guided by young people. If we do, the future will be amazing.

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> Kids at every age have less shame than adults and are often more connected to their curiosity and have fewer pretences—**they're more likely to ask questions with fewer filters.**

I want kids to know there's no right or wrong way to have a body, and all bodies are worthy and beautiful the way they are. I want them to know there's a future for them.

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Strawberry jam, strawberry shortcake, strawberry kisses and strawberry milkshakes. Is there anything this lovely red berry can't make better? We say no!

In fact, we'd wager that strawberries may just be the best fruit of all. There are hundreds of different species and subspecies, offering a huge range of diverse fruit. Strawberries come big, small, sweet and sour. They can be found in the wild or homegrown in a planter box. They'll grow in a variety of climates, so they're available pretty much year-round. And these days you can find not just red ones but white, pink and even yellow too.

But first: let's correct the record. The first thing you need to know about strawberries is that they're not actually 'berries' at all. They're little red imposters! Or technically, they're what's known in botanical terms as an 'aggregate accessory' fruit—where the fleshy part that you eat is actually the part that holds the ovaries, rather than the ripened ovaries themselves (as is the case for most fruit). And yes, those tiny little 'seeds' all studded around the outside of a strawberry are indeed its ovaries—each one with a tiny little seed inside it. (It's almost like an inside-out berry, really.) Strawberries actually belong to the rose family, and their name is thought to come from the fact that they are often found growing near matted straw in the wild. Mind blown? It should be.

The variety we most commonly encounter today in commercially grown fruit is a hybrid species known as the 'garden strawberry' (or *Fragaria × ananassa*, if you like to keep a little Latin lingo up your sleeve). It was first grown in Brittany, France, in the late 1700s before spreading around the world as a commercial crop. Before then, strawberries were harvested either from the wild or from a few cultivated types grown at small scale—a practice dating back to at least Ancient Rome. It isn't known where strawberries first originated, but they are thought to be native to Asia, Europe, and particularly North and South America, where they have been enjoyed by indigenous people for centuries. To this day, some American Indian tribes still celebrate the ripening month of June as 'Strawberry Moon', gathering to "celebrate spring and nurture friendships" over strawberry moon tea and strawberry pan cake.

While strawberries are a hermaphroditic plant—meaning their flowers possess both types of sex organs—they will only develop as either male or female (and on rare occasions, both!).

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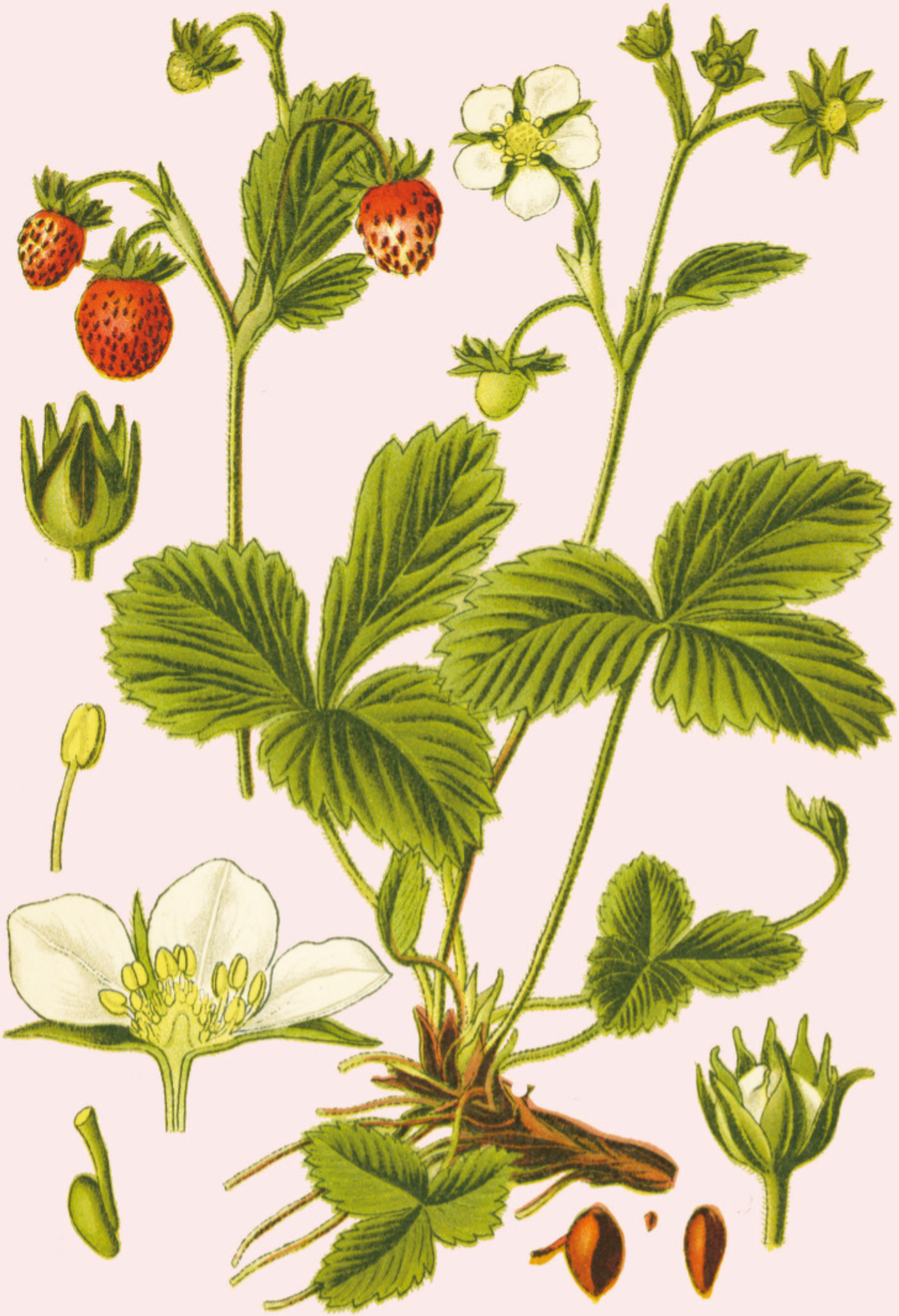
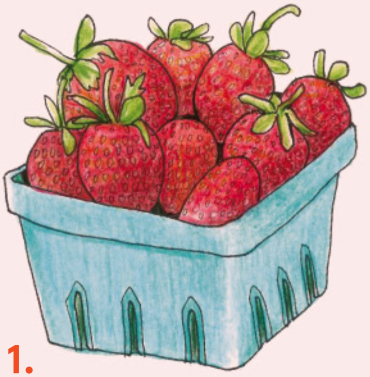
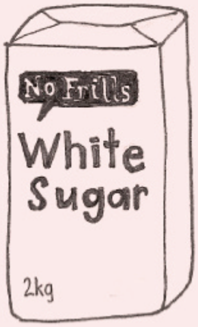


FRAGARIA × ANANASSA

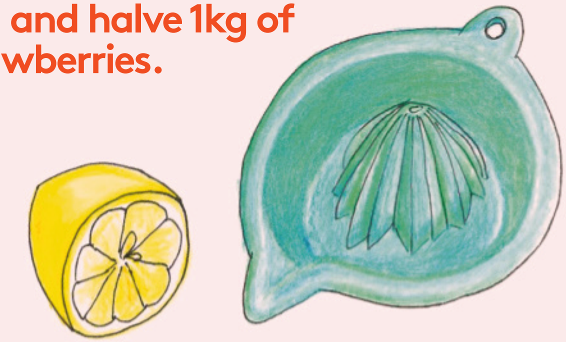
stawberry jam !



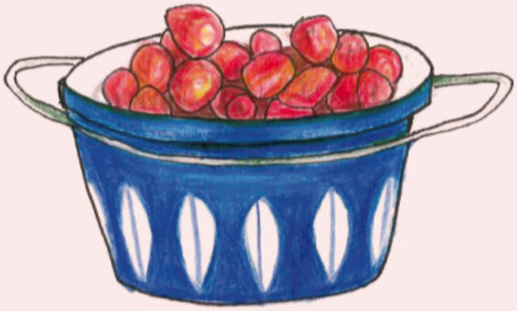
Step 1.
Hull and halve 1kg of strawberries.



Step 2.
Measure 1kg of white sugar.



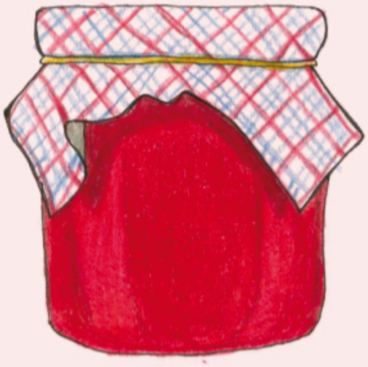
Step 3.
Juice 2 large lemons and strain.



Step 4.
Place all ingredients into a very large saucepan, stir and leave for 1 hour to macerate.

Place over high heat for about 20 minutes to boil rapidly, stirring frequently.

Once mixture has reached 105°C, remove from heat.



Step 5.
Ladle into sterilised jars and seal.

Strawberries actually belong to the rose family, and their name is thought to come from the fact that they are often found growing near matted straw in the wild. Mind blown? It should be.

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The cross-breeding of different varieties around the world has seen some unique features emerge: the diamante, for example, produces very large fruit—perfect for dipping into chocolate—while one of the most recently cultivated novelties is the pineberry, a very pale berry with red seeds and a tropical flavour reminiscent of a pineapple. But if you're after something a bit more traditional, it's hard to go past the alpine, a "tiny and exquisitely sweet" wild fruit from France, best enjoyed with a sprinkling of sugar to help draw the flavour out.

Strawberries have long been associated with indulgence, high society and pleasure. Madame Tallien, a famous socialite during the Napoleonic years, was rumoured to bathe in the juice of fresh strawberries ... which seems a sweet but sticky way to have a splash. The Tudor kitchens of King Henry VIII are credited with having 'invented' the perfect pairing of strawberries and cream (which has become an iconic Wimbledon snack—although, even historians admit it's hard to imagine it hadn't been done before then). Strawberry leaves are featured on some of the coronets of members of the British royal family, and the fruit was a favourite of Queen Elizabeth II, who often picked her own. Meanwhile, the strawberry's reputation as an aphrodisiac most likely has its roots in ancient Rome, where the fruit was seen as a symbol of Venus, the God of Love, thanks to its red colour and heart shape.

Nutritionally, strawberries are vitamin C superstars, provide decent amounts of manganese and other important trace minerals, and are usually fairly low in sugar despite their wonderful flavour. This makes them an ideal food for people with diabetes and other medical conditions that require careful control of blood sugar. What's more, they can help to reduce cholesterol, blood pressure and inflammation. Put it this way: there is no good reason not to have strawberries as a regular part of your diet! (Unless you suffer from fragariaphobia, the fear of strawberries, which is a real—albeit rare—thing.) It's also worth noting that, historically, the entire strawberry plant (roots, leaves and all) was used as a medicinal herb to help with conditions such as gout and indigestion, as well as a tonic to improve skin and treat sunburn. (Maybe that's what Madame Tallien was hoping for with her strawberry juice soaks?) The Romans also believed strawberries could help cure depressive illnesses, along with kidney stones and sore throats.

All that makes for one heck of a resume for an everyday fruit. So it's no surprise that strawberries are so beloved they've inspired toys (any '80s kids out there will surely remember Strawberry Shortcake), songs, artworks, a museum and dozens of strawberry festivals all over the world. A fruit that's good for you, tastes great and may just get you in the mood for love? That's hard to top. The Beatles had it right when they sang *Strawberry Fields Forever*.

///

STRAWBERRY JAM DROPS

Makes 18

125g / 4.4oz butter, softened
75g / 2.6oz caster sugar
175g / 6.2oz plain flour
1 tsp baking powder
2 tbsp milk, if needed
100–150g / 3.5–5.2oz strawberry jam

1. Line a baking tray with baking paper and preheat the oven to 180°C / 350°F / Gas Mark 4.

2. Beat the butter and sugar together in an electric mixer on high speed, until pale and fluffy. Add the flour and baking powder and, on the lowest setting, gently beat until just combined. If the mixture seems too dry and crumbly, you can add a small amount of milk until it comes together.

3. Roll mixture into 18 walnut-sized balls and flatten each to make a disc shape. Lay out on the baking tray as you go, and use a teaspoon (or your thumb!) to make a little indentation for the jam.

4. Spoon jam into each indentation and place biscuits in the oven to bake.

5. Bake for 10–15 minutes until biscuits are completely cooked but not browned.

6. Place on a wire rack to cool completely.

///

Let's make pom-pom strawberries!

Step 1.

You will need:

- 2 cardboard templates
- scissors
- red/green/white wool

Step 2.

Use the template on this page and cut two shapes out of cardboard. Put the two templates together. Wrap red wool around the top of the 'U' shape for the strawberry base. Wrap small amounts of white wool as you go—these will become the 'seeds'.

Step 3.

At the end of one side of the red wool, wrap a small bunch of green wool. Wrap this more loosely than the red and white wool. This will become the 'strawberry leaves'.

Step 4.

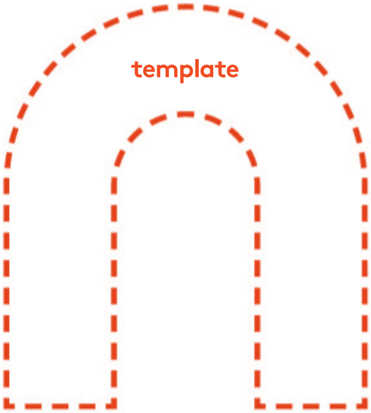
Finish with a final wrap of red wool over the top. TIP: The more wool you can wrap, the fuller the pom-pom will be.

Step 5.

Time to cut. This is the trickiest part. Insert scissors between the two pieces of the cardboard template and cut the wool so it separates. This can be hard to cut—just take it slow and cut little bits at a time. TIP: Hold the ends of the template together with butterfly clips. This will keep the wool in place as you cut. Once cut, pull a piece of wool between the templates (remove butterfly clips before this, if using) and tie a tight knot to bundle the wool together.

Step 6.

Trim time. Hold all the green wool on top together and trim the red part only into a neat ball at first. Then trim the bottom end into a pointy shape to resemble a strawberry. Leave the green wool in the centre longer for leaves.



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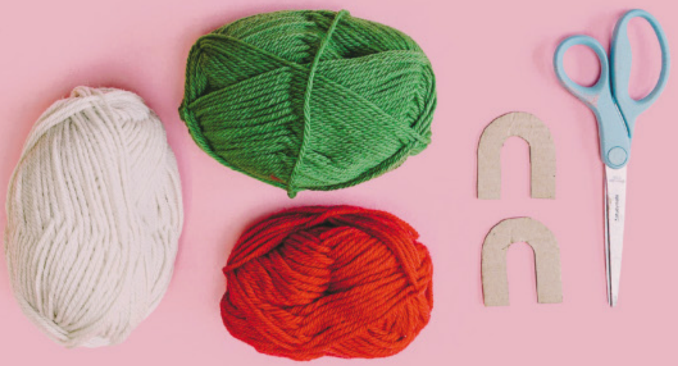

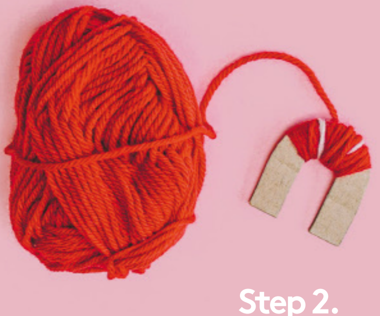

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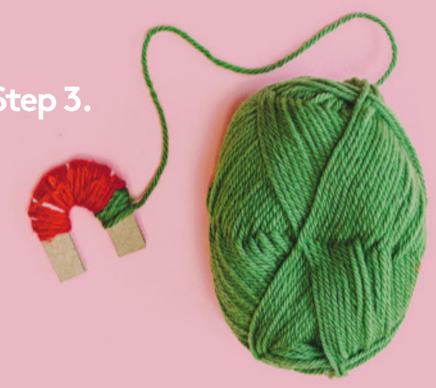
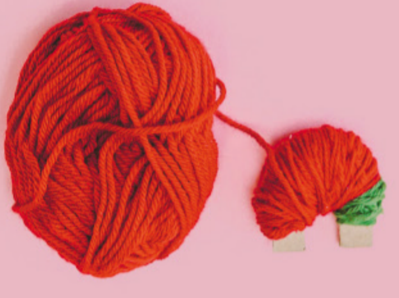
Step 3.





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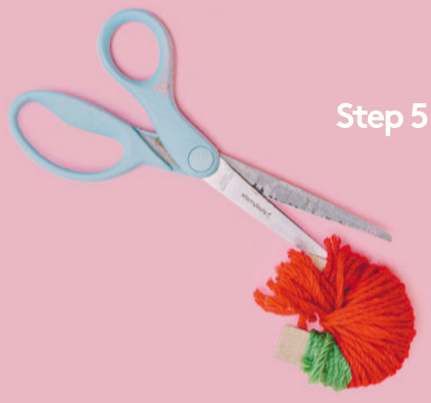
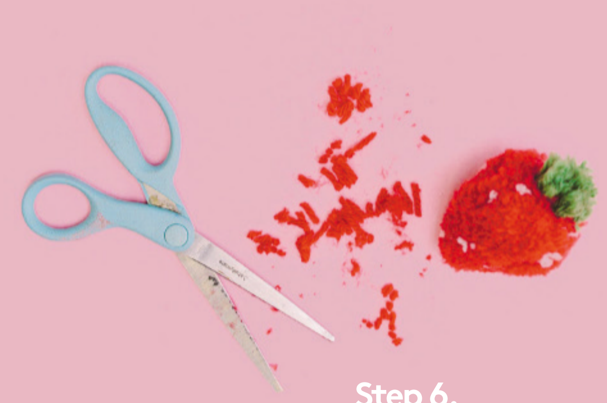


Step 5.



Step 6.

birth stories

Sophie Walker has interviewed more than 350 women about their experiences with pregnancy, birth, loss and postpartum care and her podcast has had 10 million downloads. She believes the key to having a positive birth experience is education.

Tell us about yourself and your family.

I'm Sophie, and I live in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne with my husband and our three little boys (nine, six and three).

My husband is a primary school teacher but is on long-service leave, trying out life as a stay-at-home dad. Like many teachers, he's feeling pretty burnt out from Covid, but he's a great teacher with a lot to offer kids, so I hope he finds a way to go back in some capacity.

As for me, I'm excited to be talking to you from my home office. I used to record my Australian Birth Stories podcast from my car. It wasn't great for ergonomics, but I have three very loud boys, and it can be hard to coordinate everyone being out of the house while also interviewing someone else with a baby and kids.

What did you do before you started Australian Birth Stories?

I have a BA in Health Science and International Relations, and I had big dreams of working overseas with an NGO. I moved to London and volunteered with Médecins Sans Frontières, but I ended up working in other jobs. When I came back to Australia, I did my Master of Public Health and specialised in women's health and international health—still thinking I might do aid work.

After that, I worked in cancer research, helping research women with a predisposition to breast and ovarian cancer. This role required lots of interviewing and reviewing pathology reports, so it bought together my love of health science and my love of talking. I left that position to have my first son, and after a year off with him, I started working with the Cancer Council. It wasn't until the birth of my second son that I left the Cancer Council and started the podcast.

What is Australian Birth Stories?

It started as a podcast collating Australian pregnancy and childbirth stories. When I had my first child, the birth was really difficult, and I felt very underprepared and came away thinking, "That was not what I expected."

When I was pregnant the second time, I ingested as many birth stories as possible, but found it hard to access Australian stories that spoke of the drugs and hospital models we are familiar with here. And when I mentioned it to a friend, she said, "You should just do a podcast." This was in 2017, before podcasts were a big thing. I just watched some free YouTube tutorials and did it on my laptop.

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Initially, only family and close friends listened. The first episode is about my second birth, and the second episode features my sister's experience. Then I literally badgered close friends because I knew I had to keep the momentum going and do one every week. These days, I have more than 5,000 applications of stories to share, and the podcast has 10 million downloads, so there's plenty of content.

Australian Birth Stories offers more than a podcast these days.

That's right. For the first two years, it was purely a podcast with a basic website explaining a little about each episode. Then, it gradually grew—I pitched to brands about advertising and reached out to a podcaster I admired about mentoring. She didn't do mentoring but recommended a friend. I was advised that my following was large enough to start selling something. So, I made an online course on postpartum care, which was a path I was walking myself—I was seeing a women's health physio for prolapse issues and trying to get on top of my iron levels. We now have five courses.

Do any of the interviews stand out in your mind?

There are so many interesting stories. There's everything from missed miscarriages and stillbirths to non-intervention water births at home, stories of gestational diabetes, and one about a woman who went into organ shutdown with HELLP syndrome. I also loved the episode about a same-sex couple who both breastfed their babies—one mother induced lactation even though she hadn't carried a baby before.

Can you tell us about your own birth stories?

I would consider the first one traumatic, though I now realise there are worse stories. I went into the birth very confident, thinking I wasn't going to have any interventions and I would embrace the challenge. I laboured for at least twenty hours but got stuck at five centimetres dilated. The midwife broke my waters, but nothing changed, so she said it was time for induction medication to help me along. So, I had an epidural too. My son was 4.4 kilograms, and because I'd had an epidural, I was lying on my back and couldn't get him out, so I had forceps, an episiotomy and a postpartum haemorrhage. My son was born blue and unresponsive. My mum and sister were there, along with my husband, and my mum ran out of the room crying because she thought he was stillborn. It was a terrible two minutes until he came around. The whole labour was about thirty-six hours.

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Research proves the best outcomes for mother and baby are when a known care provider assists throughout the whole period of care—pregnancy and postpartum. To have the same care provider while going through the public health system requires more funding. Right now, only about 3 per cent of women in Australia have access to that program.

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Going into the second birth, I felt like I had mentally given up the first time and I wanted to be well prepared. I did a lot more homework and things were easier, but my second child was also a kilo smaller. The whole labour was only five hours. I rang my midwife and explained where I was at, and she said I should come in now. I was like, “Really? I feel pretty good.” But I went in. And when I got to the hospital forty minutes later, I squatted down on the edge of the bed, and he came straight out onto the yoga mat. It was like a dream. Having two very different birth stories made me want to share those stories and was the impetus for the podcast.

For the third baby, despite everything I’d learnt, I was impatient and did a lot of acupuncture and induction massage. I don’t think he was ready to be evicted, and he wasn’t in an ideal position yet. The midwife said she’d break my waters and see if that helped him move into a better position, which I’ve since learnt probably wasn’t a great thing, but he slid out after that. I think it was about forty minutes of very intense labour but with a ten-day lead-up.

Is there anything you want to see changed about birthing in Australia?

Research proves the best outcomes for mother and baby are when a known care provider assists throughout the whole period of care—pregnancy and postpartum. To have the same care provider while going through the public health system requires more funding. Right now, only about 3 per cent of women in Australia have access to that program. I used that program three times and had amazing care with a known midwife I could text throughout. I want that to be accessible for more women.

Or, if you don’t want midwifery care, having access to a known obstetrician throughout your care is really important. And again, there’s just not enough funding or access, and that’s only become worse during Covid.

There’s a real burnout in midwives at the moment, and lots of staffing issues in hospitals. I spoke to an obstetrician recently and he said, “We try and keep caesarean mums and their babies together in recovery as much as possible, but if there’s a rostering issue or the hospital is short-staffed and hasn’t got a midwife, the baby can’t stay with the mum.” That time is such an incredibly intimate point in the baby and mum’s life that can’t be re-created. To think they might not get that time together due to rostering issues makes me feel really sad.

As my audience has grown and Australian Birth Stories has gained more attention, I feel a real sense of responsibility to try and campaign for these things. I think I sat on the fence for a while.

Is there anything unique about birthing in Australia?

Australian women are “dropped at the six”. They get a quick ten-minute check-up at six weeks postpartum, and it’s like, “You’re feeling okay emotionally? You’re healing okay? Breastfeeding is okay? Great, see you later.” I think lots of other countries nurture that time and place a lot more respect and care towards the mother, even providing free pelvic floor physiotherapy to all new mothers. In Australia, the mum doesn’t seem to matter once the baby is out.

I think many other countries also have much better publicly funded home birth options. There’s an increase in people wanting to have home births in Australia, probably due to Covid and all the restrictions placed around how many people you can have in the birthing suite, but it’s quite hard to do in the public system. Yet it would take a lot of pressure off the hospital system.

What are your postpartum care tips?

Go deep and be honest. Even putting down expectations around sex is important. If it’s your first baby, that’s hard to do. But just saying, “I’ve listened to this podcast and heard lots of women find it hard to get back into sex, maybe because it’s painful or maybe because of prolapse.”

> **Having two very different birth stories made me want to share those stories and was the impetus for the podcast.**

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I want women to know that going with the flow is not a birthing plan. Just because a midwife, doctor or obstetrician helps women give birth every day, it doesn't mean they know what you want or what's best for you and your family.

People set aside time for a birthing course, but I think time also needs to be set aside to have dinner as a couple and plan how you might manage when you're both really sleep deprived, how you'll cope when one parent transitions back to work, and all the expectations. It's very easy to get into a passive-aggressive stage because couples have assumed the other person will do certain things.

And then, when you do feel ready, talk about how you might like to reintroduce it.

People set aside time for a birthing course, but I think time also needs to be set aside to have dinner as a couple and plan how you might manage when you're both really sleep deprived, how you'll cope when one parent transitions back to work, and all the expectations. It's very easy to get into a passive-aggressive stage because couples have assumed the other person will do certain things.

Tell us about your book.

We are always being asked for book recommendations but not many are Australian or recent. So, we've tried to create something that's Australian and inclusive.

The book's called *The Complete Australian Guide to Pregnancy and Birth*, and it includes stories from the podcast. A big point of difference is that it's very mother-focused while also educating you on what is happening with the baby. You are a mother from the minute you conceive. We try to guide a mother so that when you come into the fourth trimester, and you're mothering and caring for your baby, you can draw on some of those skills you've learnt.

Jodi, who I co-wrote it with, is a yoga teacher and birth educator. So, we've got some beautiful breathwork and meditations. We've also got a whole chapter written on birthing on Country, which a team of First Nations midwives wrote for us. And we've got a chapter on miscarriage.

One in four Australian women miscarry. Those numbers could be higher. If women reading our book get to a point where their pregnancy doesn't progress, we don't want them to feel like they don't belong in that space and shut the book because they think they're no longer a mother. There's a lot of unspoken options and care for how you go about having a miscarriage. I haven't miscarried myself, and neither has Jodi, so we've gone to people who have and documented what's involved.

We've also got a section on domestic violence, which exponentially increases, particularly for an unplanned pregnancy. So, we've got resources to support women through that. We've touched on some pretty heavy topics while trying to be nurturing, inclusive and as all-encompassing as possible.

What do you want birthing people to know?

I want women to know that going with the flow is not a birthing plan. Just because a midwife, doctor or obstetrician helps women give birth every day, it doesn't mean they know what you want or what's best for you and your family. Education is the only answer. If you educate yourself on all the potential options, you'll feel more empowered and like you're still making decisions during the birth—even if it's not going the way you hoped. Knowing your options is crucial. One in three women in Australia report having birth trauma, and I believe education is a big part of reducing those numbers.

Is there anything you want birthing partners to know?

Partners should be just as educated as the person birthing. In my first birth, I said I wanted an epidural. My husband said, "But remember you said you didn't really want that?" And I was like, "Okay, get Mum." I got Mum over and said, "I'm serious. Order it now, it could take an hour—get me an epidural." My husband had heard my original plan, but we hadn't discussed it properly before the event and communicated all the options.

Then, in my second labour, I didn't speak at all. Birthing partners should know what your labour could look and sound like and understand you could be a totally different person. If someone had done light touch massage to me when I was birthing, I think I would have punched them.

It's also really important to have conversations about postpartum. If you want to breastfeed, there are things you'll need to have in place to support you, and that means talking to your partner and setting things up. Discussing it before you're both sleep deprived and stressed makes the conversation much easier.

Have you learnt anything about yourself through your work with Australian Birth Stories?

From a business sense, I've learnt that if you break things down into small tasks, you can achieve anything. I'm not very organised, so it's bizarre to think I run my own business. I've done a lot of online courses and listened to a lot of business podcasts—just take it one step at a time.

From a birth point of view, I think I would do things differently to what I did in my previous births. I'm definitely not going to have a fourth child, but I'm always learning, reflecting and growing. It can be hard to take your own advice, but I wish I had stayed home and relaxed more.

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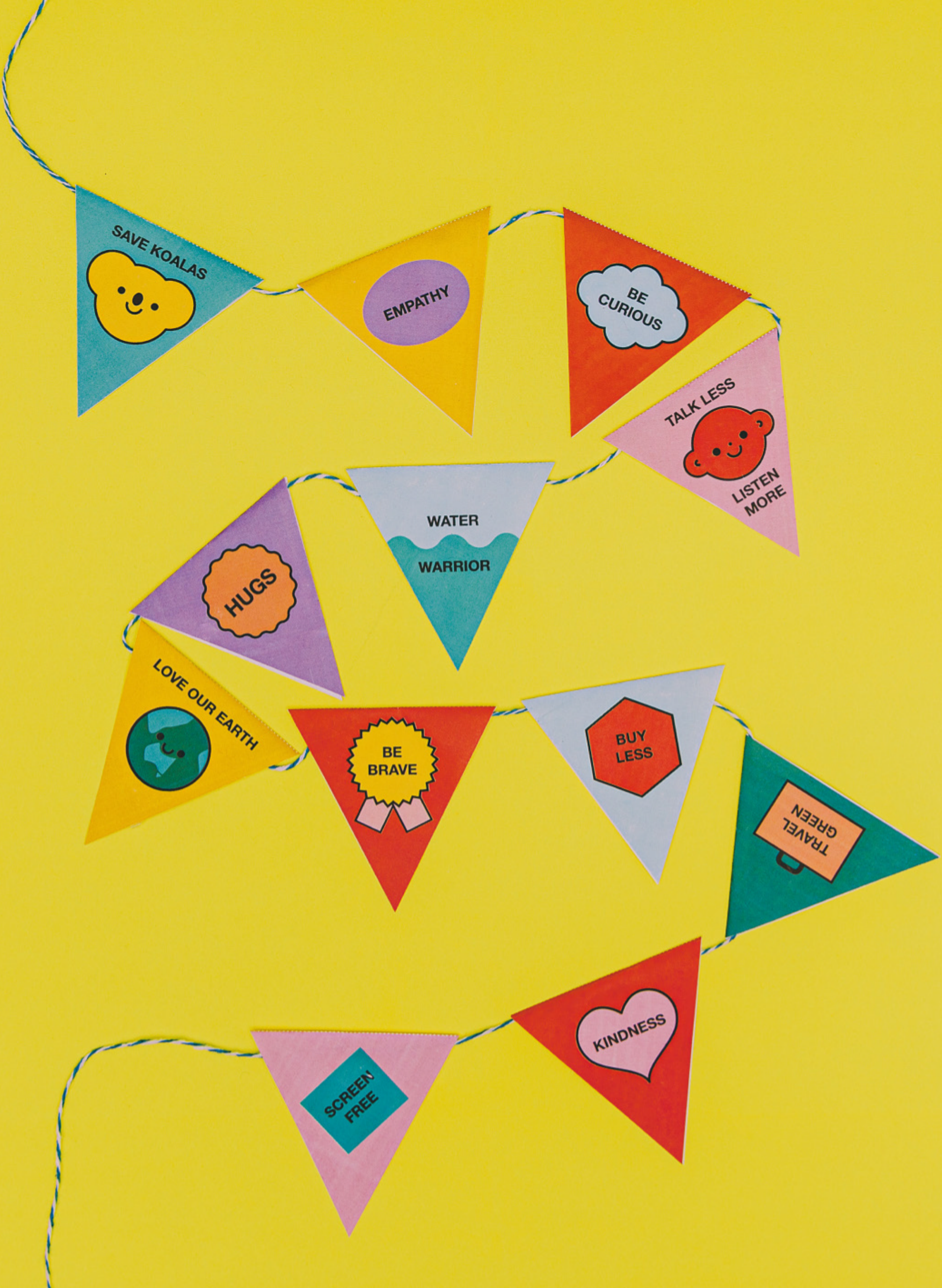
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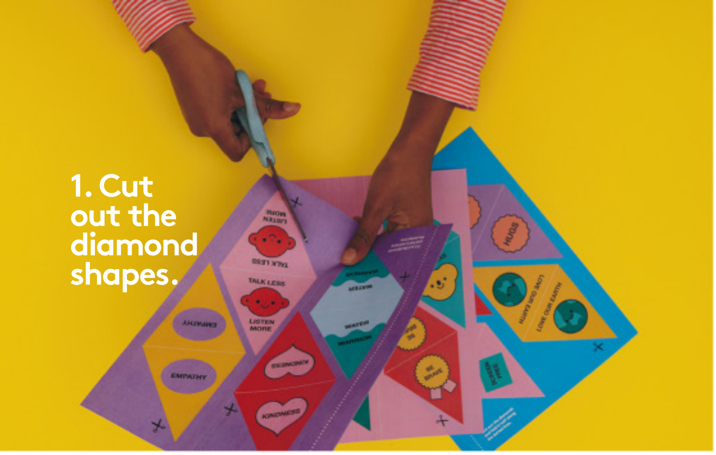

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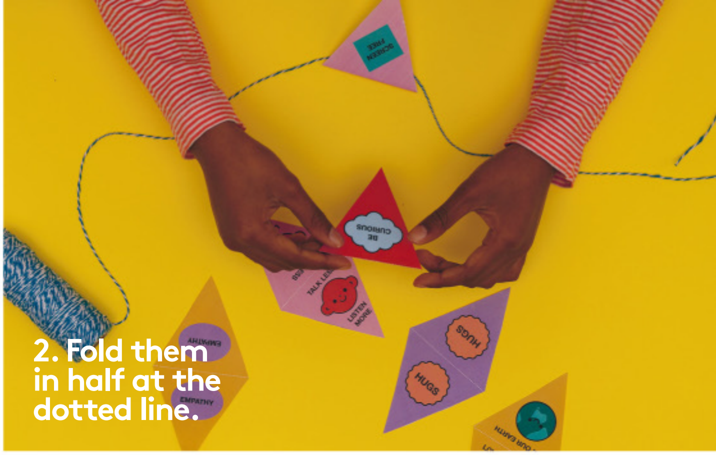

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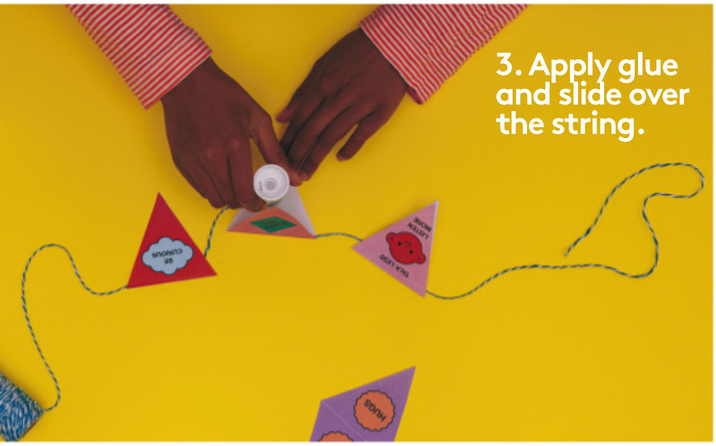

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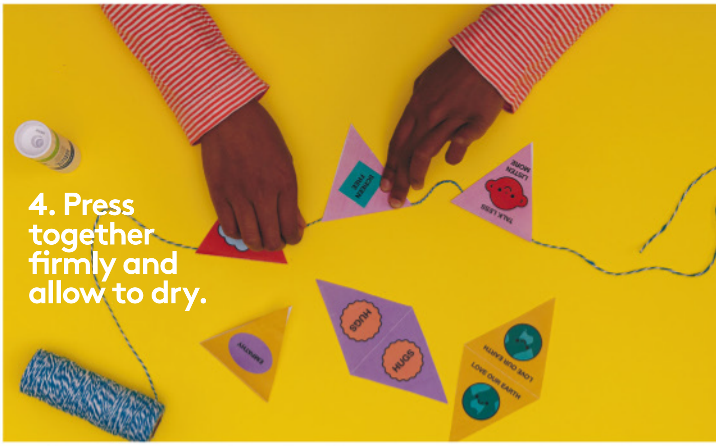

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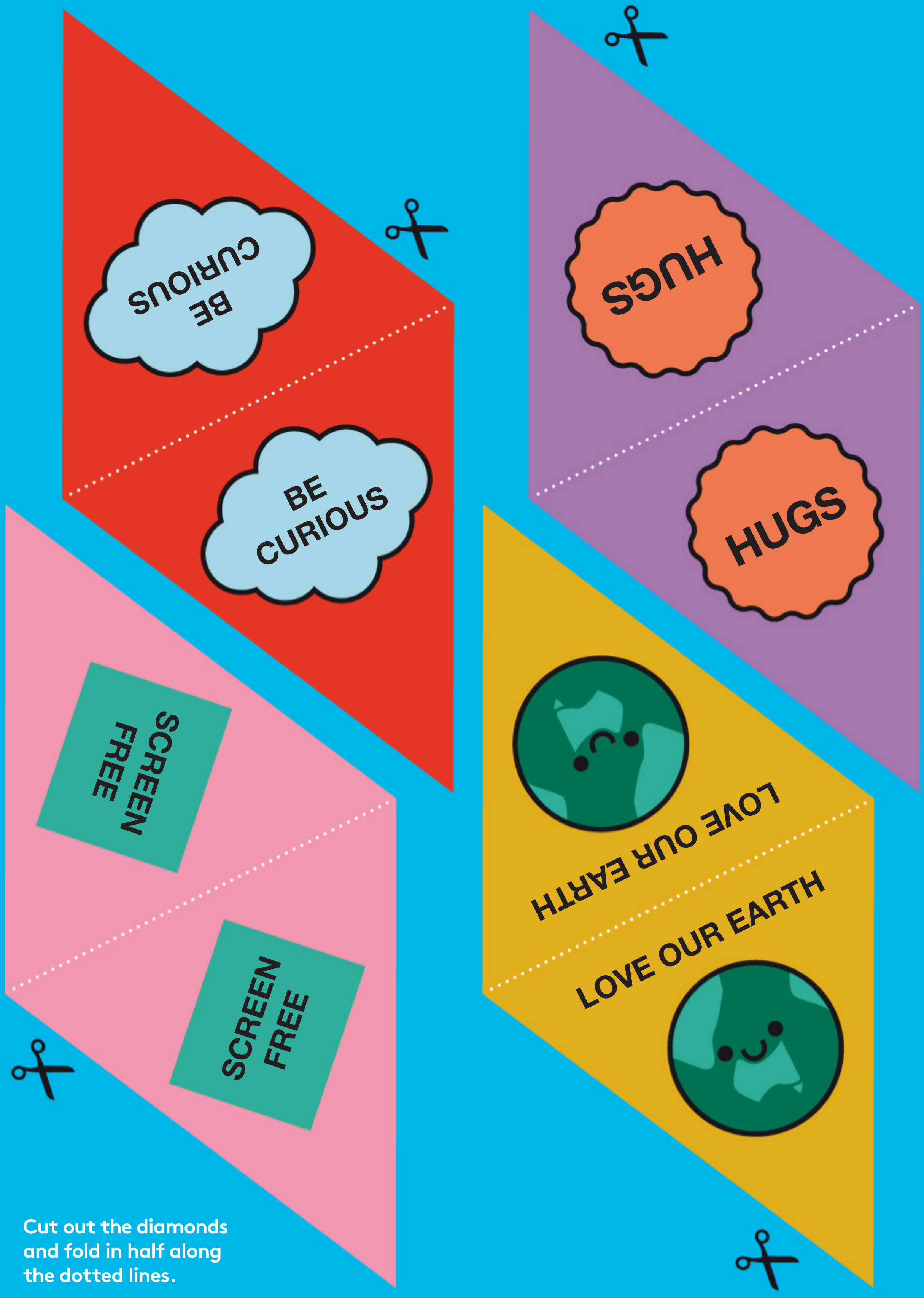
5. Hang up!

LOVE OUR EARTH
BE BRAVE
BUY LESS
TRAVEL GREEN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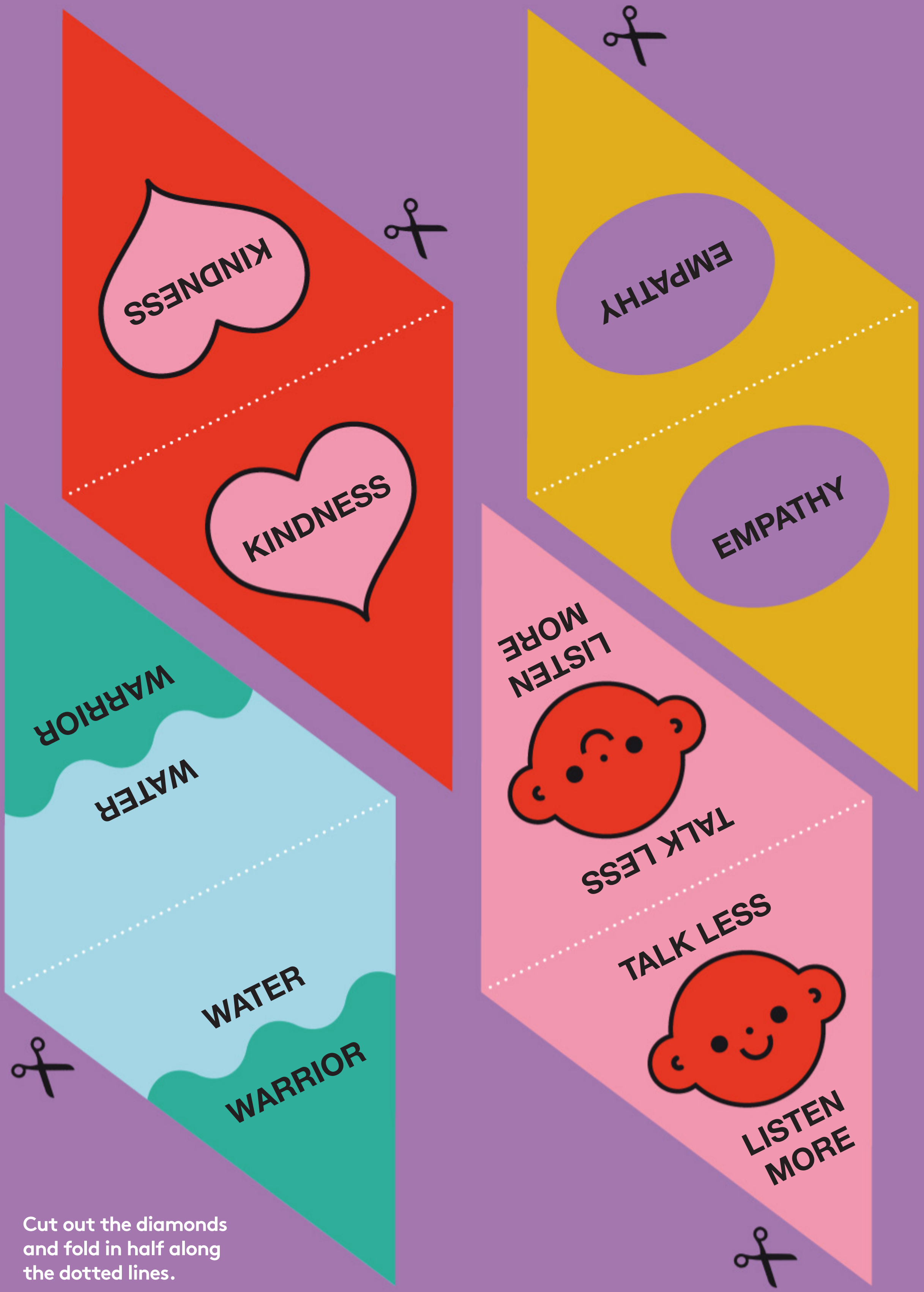
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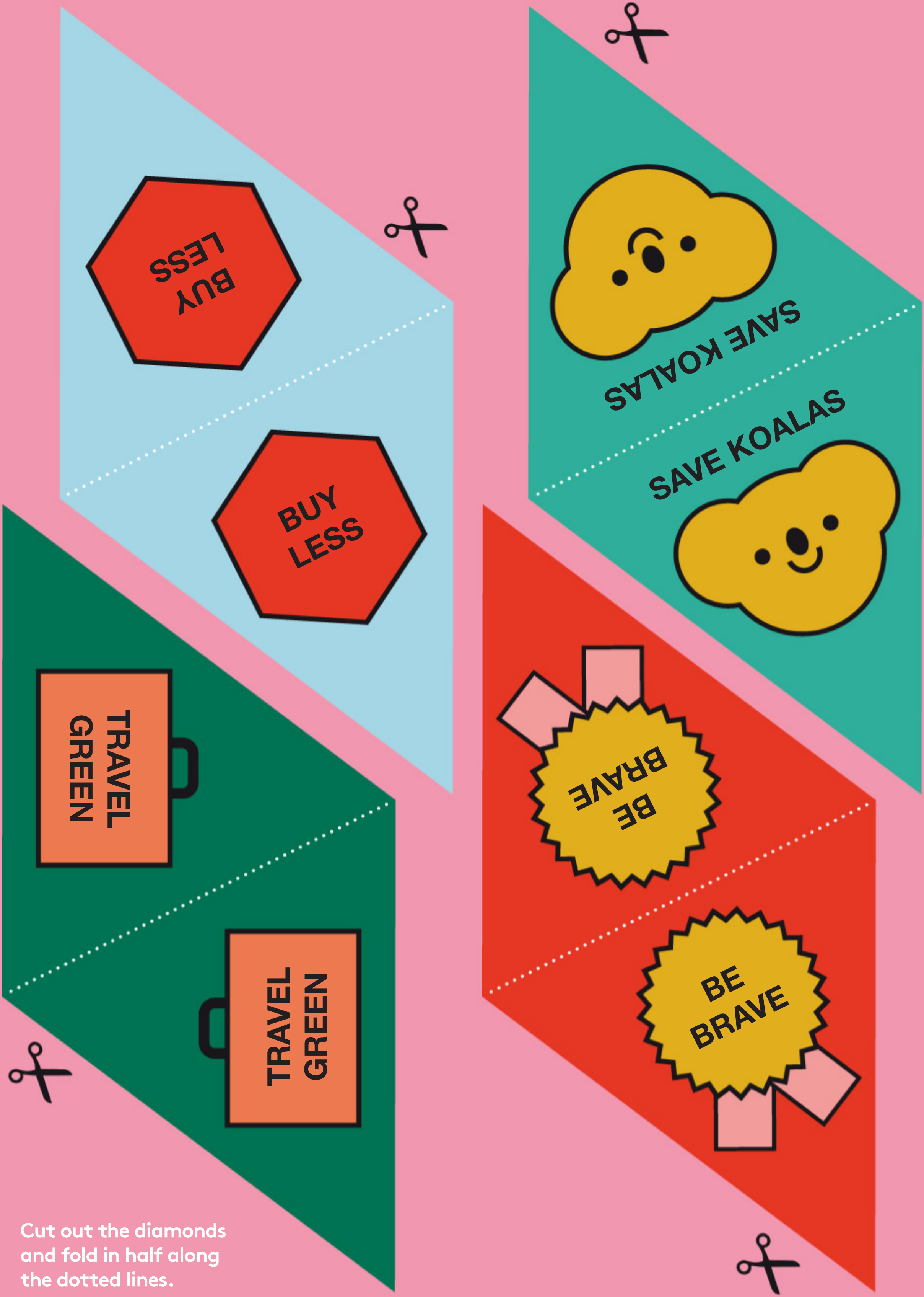
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Cut out the diamonds
and fold in half along
the dotted lines.

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the story-teller cook.

Polish-born cookbook author Zuza Zak is on a mission to bring Eastern European food to the world, with a dose of history and storytelling on the side. Her latest book, *Pierogi*, focuses on the Polish dumpling.

Who is in your family?

There's me, my partner and our two daughters, aged two and six.

What do you do for work?

I describe myself as a "storyteller-cook". My aim is to inspire people to cook and eat more food from Eastern Europe, particularly Poland.

How does your family tackle the work and parenting balance?

Because our kids are quite young, it's a bit tricky at the moment and feels like juggling. But because my partner freelances, we can share the parenting at times.

When he is working full time, I take the brunt of it and I have very little time to do my work, so I work nights, weekends, et cetera. If there's a deadline, my parents and my partner's parents are called upon to help.

I'm currently working on a fourth book, and once that's released, I'm going to rest for a little while and work on my PhD—on Polish home cooking and identity.

How did you get into writing cookbooks?

Well, I got into TV first and had been hoping to get into documentaries. But in the end, I made promos for brands like the Discovery Channel and was a freelance promo producer at one point. But I was commuting for three hours a day, which was really soul destroying. And then I started a food blog. I wrote an article about Polish food and showed it to a journalist friend who said, "I think you should write a book." So I did.

I spent about five years writing this book. I got up every day and wrote for half an hour. Despite waking up earlier to do the work, I felt energised by it. But around the time I met my partner, I stopped writing it. I remember talking with him and his friend and he said, "Zuza is writing a book about Polish food." And I had to explain: I've stopped writing it because I don't think it's going anywhere. I kept sending manuscripts and was getting nothing back. I literally got one rejection letter and was so happy to receive it because someone finally acknowledged I existed. Plus, it was a really nice rejection letter. They wished me luck and said my book sounded very interesting.

Well, my partner's friend said he knew an agent and would introduce me. The agent didn't do any work with cookbooks, but she liked what I showed her and said she would try to get me a publisher but couldn't make any promises. We ended up hearing from a couple of interested parties, and I kept working in TV while finishing the book. When my baby was born, I realised having two parents who both work freelance in TV wasn't really compatible with my childcare wishes. So, I turned to this food writing career.

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What's your creative process like when you're writing a new book and collecting recipes?

It begins with research. I go to the library, read old books, talk to lots of people and start collecting recipes. I then test everything and work on certain recipes with potential. Now and again, you come across a perfect recipe—that's gold dust. Then I just make sure I know the story behind it so I can share it in my book. And lastly, I write stories that I feel bring it all together—that part feels a little bit like magic.

Were you born in Poland?

Yes, I was born in Poland and moved to the UK around age eight. I'm still here now. We moved at a time when Poland was still a communist country. My dad was a doctor and won a scholarship to have a job here in the UK for a year. They told me we were only going for a year, but they knew they wouldn't return. It was really difficult to get out of Poland in those days, and they were worried we would be questioned and that I might crack and give it away.

But my mum was adamant that she wouldn't have another child unless she lived somewhere else, and she was already pregnant when we left. So, by hook or by crook, they were going to stay here. When communism fell two years later, I remember discussing whether we would go back or not. They knew it would be very difficult over there for some years, so we stayed.

What did British people think of Polish food when you moved to the UK?

I saw a big disconnect between what people thought of Polish food and what I knew it to be. I still do, and that's why I wrote my first cookbook.

Part of the reason was because people didn't know much about Poland back then. Polish people were a lot more aware of where everything was in Europe and the West than people were aware of us—if that makes sense.

Even when I got older, I realised British people might go to Poland for a weekend or maybe a stag party, and they were taking that very short experience as an understanding of what Polish food was about. That's a very poor representation. It was a really wild time in Poland in the early 1990s after communism fell. People there hadn't had businesses for a very, very long time. Poland has always had a home-cooked culture, but especially during communism. So, if you visited Poland for a weekend, you would not have got a good impression of Polish food unless you knew someone who was going to invite you into their home. Nowadays, it's completely changed because Poland has really caught up.

Where did you grow up?

We lived in Warsaw, which is the capital. Back then, everyone lived in apartments, but each weekend we went to our działka. A działka is a piece of land in the country or a regional area. Everyone had one back then. Some people had houses on theirs, and others would camp on their land. But every weekend, we left the city and would be in nature. Our plot of land was in a pine forest. We hung out in the forest for the day and picked bilberries and things like that.

These days, my uncles and my mum's family—including my mum—have houses on their plots. In fact, my parents are moving to theirs next year. It's still the countryside, but there are a lot more houses there these days, and it's like a little village for my family. When we moved to the UK, we lived all around. But I've been in London ever since I was eighteen and I take regular trips back to Poland.

What is unique about the food in Warsaw?

Well, there were the partitions of Poland for almost 200 years, and under the partitions, Warsaw was part of Russia. Because of that, there's a lot of Eastern influence in Warsaw. If you look on a map, Warsaw is only a tiny bit east—it's actually quite central—but it was part of Russia for a long time, which influenced things. But then, in other ways, people in Warsaw were almost overcompensating and trying to uphold Polish traditions, despite everything.

Growing up, I ate a lot of Polish food, of course. Breakfast was either kasza—porridge made from all kinds of grains—or kanapki, which are open sandwiches. Dinner would always be at 3pm and consisted of soup followed by a meat course. When we moved to the UK, the dinner moved to 5pm, but my mum still tended to cook Polish food.

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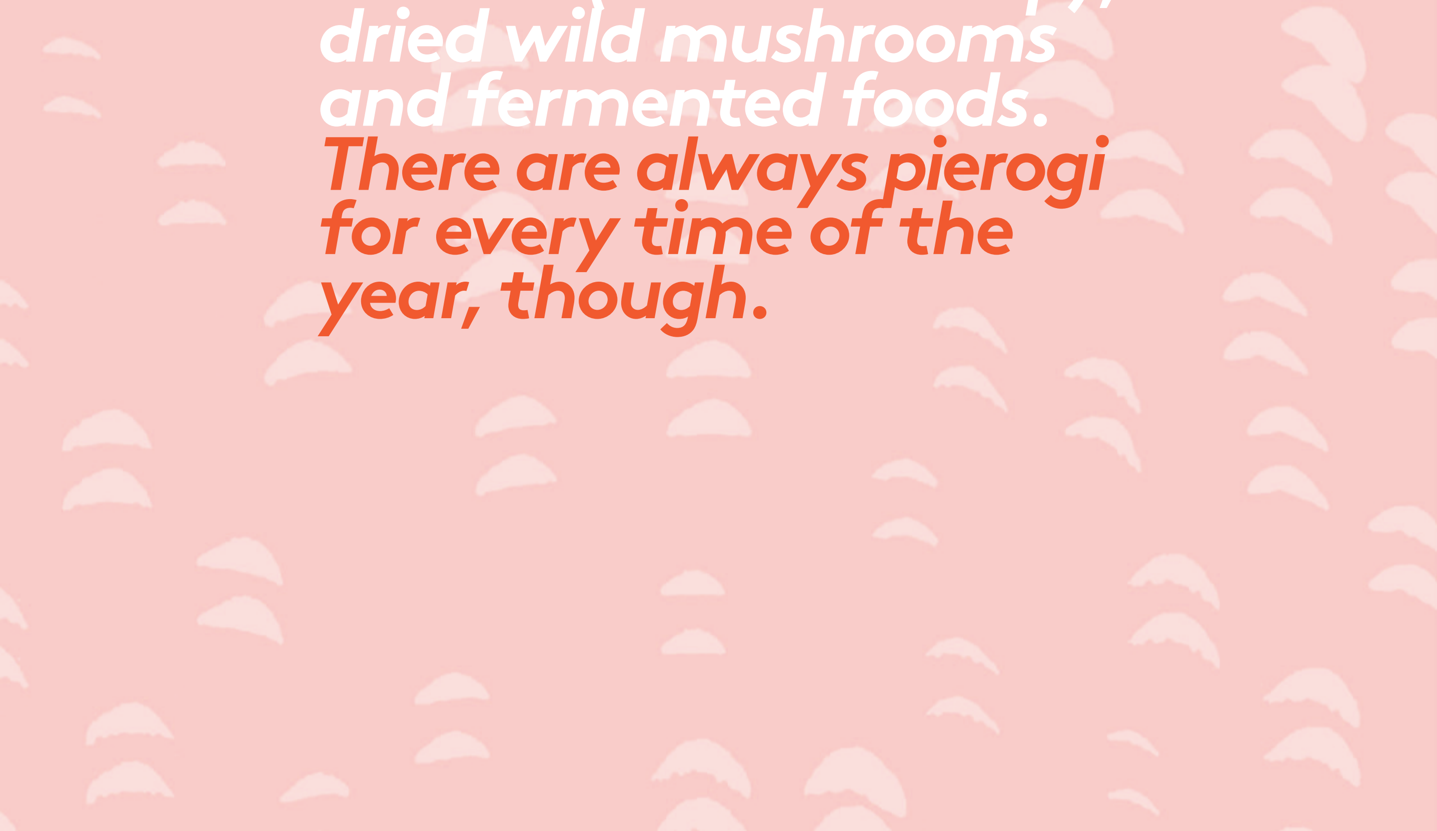
Poland has always had a home-cooked culture, but especially during communism. So, if you visited Poland for a weekend, you would not have got a good impression of Polish food unless you knew someone who was going to invite you into their home.

Polish food is very seasonal. We eat cold soups, berries, slaws and cold cuts in the summer. In the winter, there's generally bigos (sauerkraut stew), barszcz (beetroot soup), dried wild mushrooms and fermented foods. There are always pierogi for every time of the year, though.



Pork is the most commonly eaten meat in Poland. We would have it as a topping on a meal or with pierogi. Lamb is not very common in Poland. We would eat beef every now and again. But things like turkey, duck or wild pheasant were common. My mum still cooks those meats now, and my children love it. They also love her broth, and insist she make it for them whenever she visits. If she hasn't visited for a while, I'll make it. But it never feels like enough for dinner and I feel like I have to make a main course as well, which is too much work. So, we don't eat soup much.

If someone hasn't eaten Polish food before, how would you describe it?

Generally, I would say Polish food is very seasonal. We eat cold soups, berries, slaws and cold cuts in the summer. In the winter, there's generally bigos (sauerkraut stew), barszcz (beetroot soup), dried wild mushrooms and fermented foods. There are always pierogi for every time of the year, though.

What is a pierogi?

Pierogi is a polish dumpling—a round piece of dough with a filling inside, which is generally boiled, then possibly fried.

What would a traditional pierogi be filled with?

At Christmas, they would have a sauerkraut and mushroom filling. In the summer—bilberries (jagody). And all year around, they would have Pierogi Ruski made with twaróg (a soft white cheese), potatoes and caramelised onions.

Where did you develop your love of food and cooking?

That developed at a young age, with my grandmothers, who helped to raise me. One of my grandmothers was a cook by profession and had a big extended family—there was always some kind of celebration at her house, for a birthday or name day. And the other grandmother would wake up at five o'clock in the morning every day and cook the whole day's food. Then she could have people around and not have to worry.

I would make dumplings with both of my grandmothers. With one, I would make pierogi, and she would always have to pinch them after me, as my little hands weren't quite strong enough to close the pierogi properly. With my other grandma, it was always kopytka—'horse hooves'—which are Polish gnocchi.

Does your family eat differently from how you were raised?

We eat a lot of veggie food during the week and only eat meat two or three times a week at the most. We also avoid pork because my partner is Muslim. When we are at my mum's house, meat is on the table every day (usually more than once a day, too!).

Travel is part of your food writing. Do you have a favourite place?

I love the Baltic Sea in Poland and the Baltic States. As a child, we used to go to the Baltic Sea, so there's a nostalgia there. The Polish-Baltic coast has lots of pine forests you walk through to reach the sea, and then you're greeted by a really fine sand. It's just so beautiful if you have the right weather. Of course, it's in the north, though, so you never know what kind of weather you're going to get.

When exploring the Baltic States for my book *Amber and Rye*, I wanted to discover what was different about each state—because we often assume they're all just really similar. The further we moved along the coast to Latvia, the more it was like dunes and powdery sand. And then in Lithuania—one of my favourite places—it was quite similar to Poland. There were lots of pines and rose hips until we reached the Curonian Spit. You could feel the old culture and pagan roots at the Curonian Spit. There's the Hill of Witches and pagan sculptures around Amber Bay. There's a sense of harking back to long-gone days that feels magical.

What's your best food-related travel memory?

A delicious fish soup that cost 1 pound at a canteen on the beach near Sopot, with fishermen bringing in the fish just outside.

Do you have any tips for introducing new flavours to kids?

Start really young, before they get fussy. And keep introducing flavours in different ways. Just because they might not like an ingredient one way doesn't mean they won't enjoy it if it's prepared in a different way.

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MAKING + SHAPING A CLASSIC HALF-MOON PIEROGI

Classic half-moon pierogi can be created in two ways. I vary my method depending on my mood. Here, I've included both methods for you to try.

Cutting out lots of circles (see page 030 and method 2) is generally the method a beginner should start with. I use this most often, as my daughter likes to get involved when I'm making pierogi at home.

Method 1

1. Once the dough is rolled, place heaped teaspoons of filling in the middle of the dough, equally spaced, in a row.

2. Fold the top half of dough over the bottom, so that it creases where the filling ends, and press around the filling to remove air bubbles.

3. Use your cutter or an upturned glass to cut half-moon shapes around each filling.

4. Use any pinch you like to seal the edges and secure the filling.

Method 2

1. Cut circles out of the dough, many at a time.

2. Place a heaped teaspoon of filling in the middle of each circle, fold the dough over and seal the edges.

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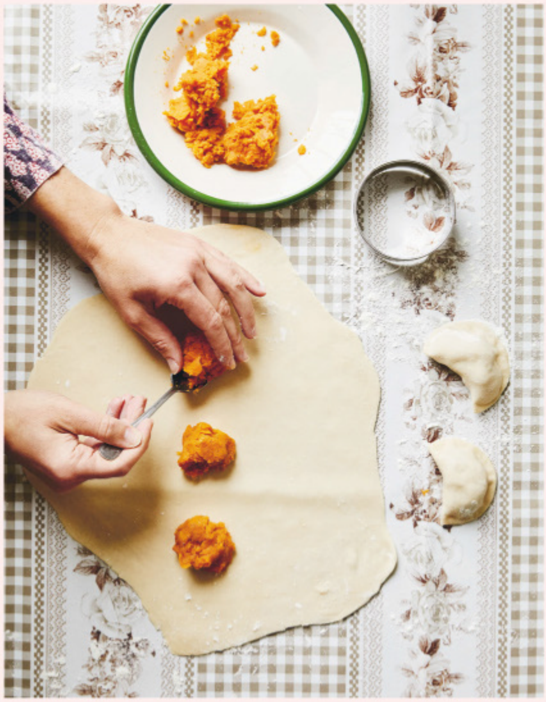
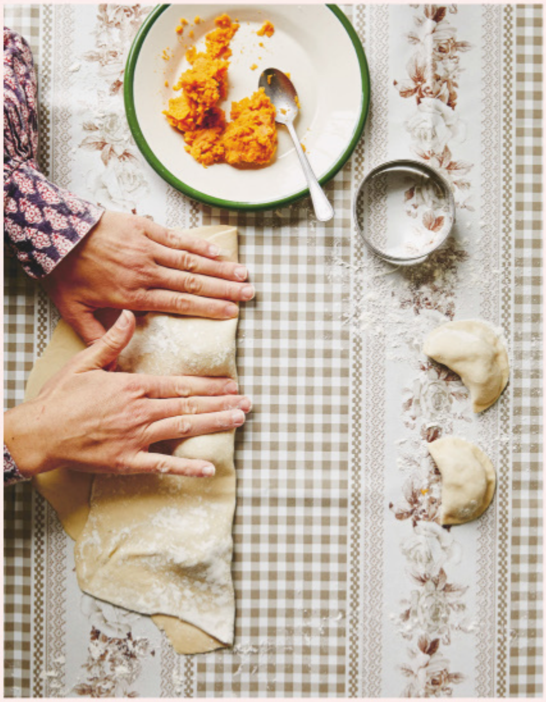
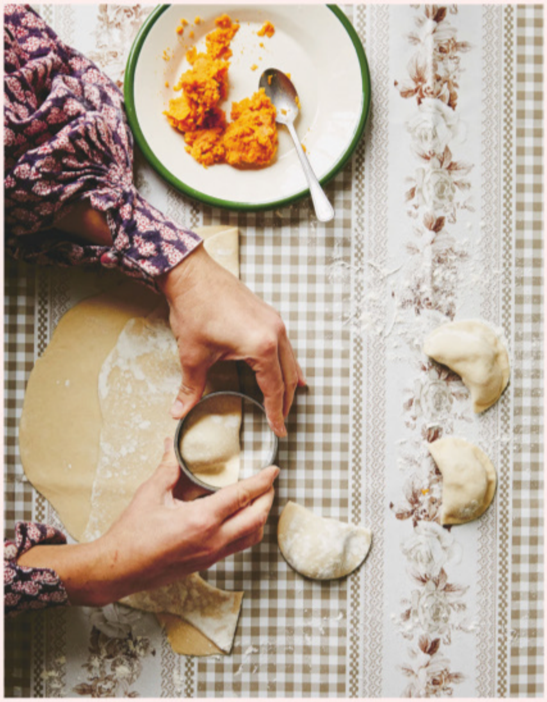
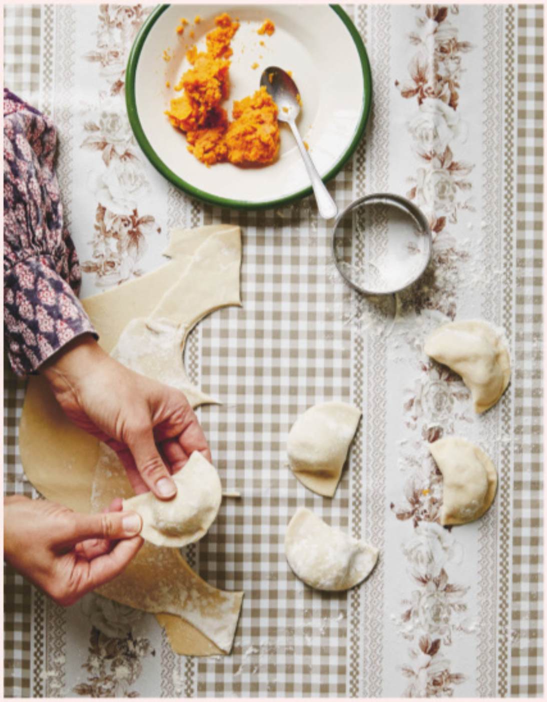
I would make dumplings with both of my grandmothers. With one, I would make pierogi, and she would always have to pinch them after me, as my little hands weren't quite strong enough to close the pierogi properly.









AUTUMNAL PUMPKIN PIEROGI BY ZUZA ZAK

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Serves 4

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The glowing colours of early autumn make it one of my favourite times of the year. These pierogi were invented to celebrate that change in season, that short moment in time when everything is slightly orange—the leaves, the squash and even the sun. It's also a great way to use up the flesh of a pumpkin that has just been carved (as long as you've bought an edible one).

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For the dough

- 2 1/2 cups plain all-purpose flour, plus extra to dust
- 2 egg yolks
- pinch of salt
- 1/2 tsp ground turmeric
- 100g / 3.5oz pumpkin purée, from a can or fresh
- 2 tbsp butter, melted
- 1 tbsp rapeseed or canola oil

For the filling

- 100g / 3.5oz twaróg or other soft white cheese
- 100g / 3.5oz pumpkin purée, from a can or fresh
- 1 tbsp soft brown sugar
- 1/2 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp ground cardamom
- large pinch of freshly grated nutmeg

To serve

- 1 tbsp butter, melted
- soured cream
- good-quality runny honey
- nasturtium or other edible flowers, optional

1. To make the dough, combine the flour in a bowl with the egg yolks, salt, turmeric and the pumpkin purée. Bring the mixture together with your hands, adding a few tablespoons of tepid water, if needed. Incorporate the melted butter. Turn the dough out onto a floured surface and knead for 6–7 minutes until the dough is elastic, then add the oil and carry on kneading for another 2 minutes or so.

2. Cover the dough with a clean, damp dish towel and rest at room temperature for 20–30 minutes.

3. Meanwhile, make your filling by combining all the filling ingredients in a bowl and mashing with a fork.

4. Roll your dough out thinly (about 0.5mm is ideal) on a floured surface and use your favourite method to shape, fill and seal the pierogi (see page 038). Put the finished pierogi on a lightly floured surface.

5. Bring a large pan of salted water to the boil.

6. Cook the pierogi in batches. Once they float to the surface, give them another 2 minutes, then remove with a slotted spoon, shake off any excess water and transfer them to a bowl with the melted butter in it. Keep warm.

7. Serve the pierogi with soured cream, honey and nasturtium flowers (if you can find them) or other seasonal edible flowers.

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PRETTY POPPY SEED PIEROGI BY ZUZA ZAK

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Serves 4–5

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Gently poppy-seedy, these pierogi contain all the flavours of the famous Polish makowiec (almond and poppy seed cake). They are a good introduction if you've only ever eaten poppy seeds sprinkled on bread before, and I'm confident that these pierogi would entice you into trying more. Cream should always be served alongside sweet pierogi, whether it's crème fraîche or clotted.

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For the dough

2 3/4 – 3 cups plain all-purpose flour, plus extra to dust
large pinch of salt
1 egg yolk
2 tbsp butter, melted
120–140ml / 4–4.5 fl oz warm water, from a pre-boiled kettle
4 tbsp poppy seeds

For the filling

250g / 9oz twaróg or similar cheese
1 egg yolk
2 tbsp soured cream or crème fraîche
3 tbsp vanilla sugar, or 3 tbsp caster sugar plus 1/4 tsp vanilla extract
3 tbsp good-quality honey
a few drops of almond extract

To serve

20g / 3/4oz butter, melted
2 tbsp almond flakes, toasted
drizzle of good-quality runny honey
crème fraîche or clotted cream

1. Combine all the ingredients for the dough, apart from the poppy seeds, in a large bowl, mixing with one hand and slowly adding the water with the other. Mix until it just comes together (you may not need all the water). Turn the dough out onto a floured surface and knead for 6–7 minutes until you get a lovely, elastic dough ball that is a pleasure to knead.

2. Incorporate the poppy seeds into the dough, working them in for another 5 minutes or so. Cover the dough with a clean, damp dish towel and set aside to rest for 20–30 minutes at room temperature.

3. Meanwhile, mash the twaróg (or other soft cheese) in a bowl with a fork, adding the egg yolk, soured cream, vanilla sugar (or caster sugar and vanilla extract), honey and almond extract.

4. Bring a large pan of salted water to the boil.

5. Roll the dough out as thin as you can on a floured work surface and use your favourite method to shape, fill and seal the pierogi (see page 038), placing them on a lightly floured surface as you go.

6. Boil the pierogi in batches until they float to the top, then give them 2 minutes more. Remove with a slotted spoon, shake off any excess water and transfer to a warm bowl with the melted butter. Keep warm.

7. Serve with a sprinkling of toasted almond flakes, a drizzle of good honey, and a dollop of crème fraîche or clotted cream.

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BUTTERMILK PIEROGI WITH BROAD BEANS + FETA BY ZUZA ZAK

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Serves 4

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My love of any kind of fermented milk product made me fall immediately in love with this flexible, slightly sour buttermilk pierogi dough. Polish food blogger Joanna Ptasia introduced me to this brilliant recipe, which has been a hit with my bób-loving family ever since. Bób (broad beans) was actually one of my daughter's first words.

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For the filling

500g / 1lb 2oz shelled fresh broad or fava beans (shelled weight)
1 tbsp cold-pressed rapeseed or canola oil
80g / 2.75oz bryndza or feta cheese
1 tsp lemon juice
1 tsp finely chopped mint
1 tsp finely chopped basil
pinch of fresh freshly grated nutmeg
salt and white pepper

For the dough

2 1/4 cups plain all-purpose flour, plus extra to dust
150ml / 5 fl oz buttermilk, plus a splash extra, optional

To serve

30g / 1oz butter, melted
handful of chopped herbs, such as mint, basil and dill
soured cream

1. Make your filling by boiling the broad beans for about 20 minutes, then peel away and discard the outer skins. Mash the beans in a bowl with the oil or pulse them in a food processor, if you prefer. Crumble in the cheese, add the lemon juice and mash to a paste. Add the chopped herbs and nutmeg, taste, then season with salt and white pepper.

2. To make the dough, put the flour in a bowl and pour in the buttermilk with one hand while mixing with the other. Once it comes together, stop adding the buttermilk (you may not need it all, so add it slowly) and form the dough into a ball. If you've added all your buttermilk and it's still a little dry, add a splash more.

3. Bring a large pan of salted water to the boil.

4. Knead the dough for 6–7 minutes on a lightly floured surface, then cover and allow to rest for 20–30 minutes at room temperature. Roll out as thinly as you can (about 0.5mm is perfect).

5. Use your favourite method to shape, fill and seal the pierogi (see page 038), placing them on a lightly floured surface as you go.

6. Boil the pierogi in batches until they float to the surface, then give them an extra minute. Remove the cooked pierogi with a slotted spoon, shake off any excess water and transfer them to a bowl with the melted butter.

7. Once all the pierogi are ready, make sure that they are all well coated in the melted butter and sprinkle over the chopped herbs to serve. Serve with soured cream, if you like.

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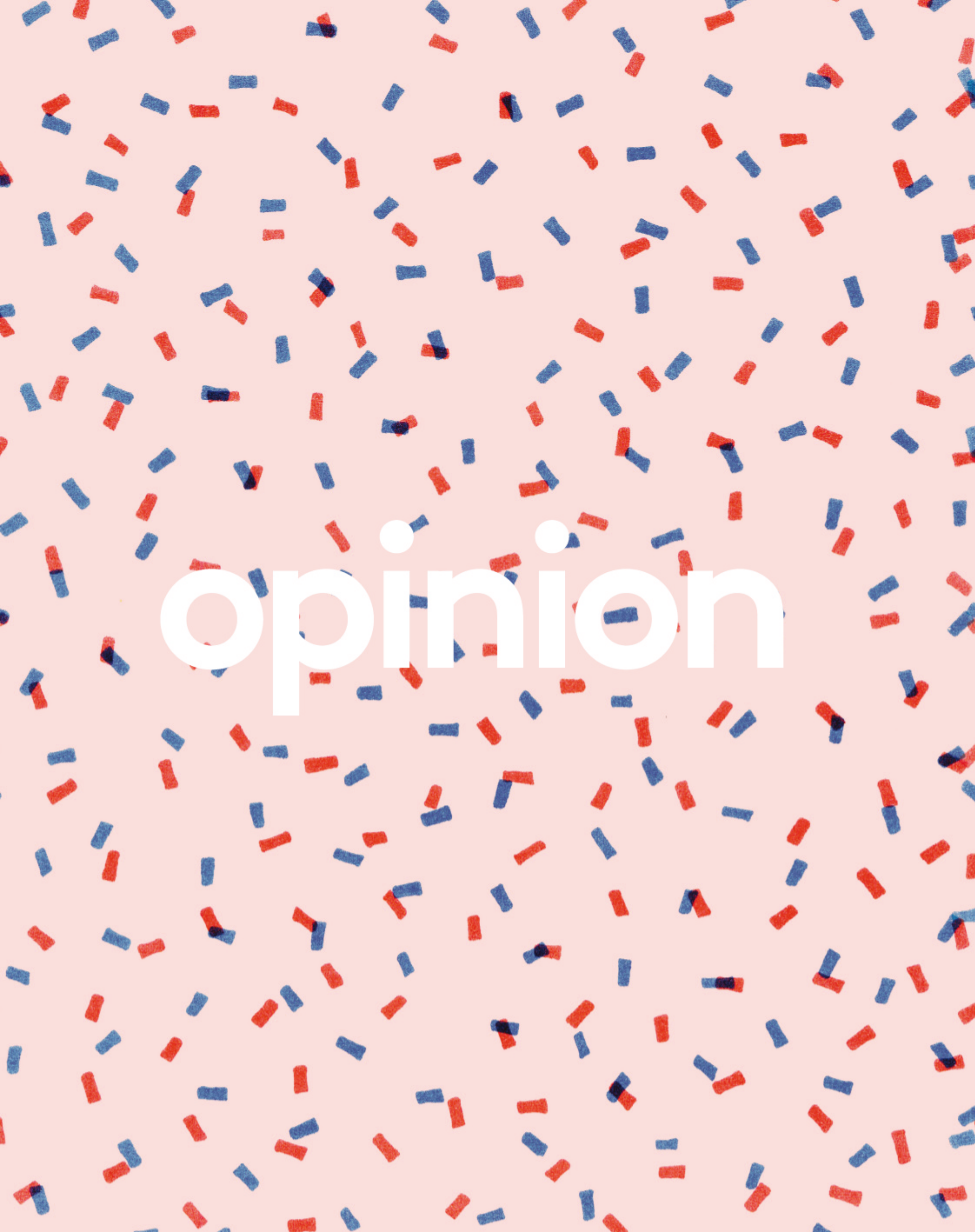

opinion

pieces

OPINION STORY ONE.

COMING OUT AS A TRANSGENDER DAD TAUGHT ME SO MUCH ABOUT SEXISM, AS TOLD TO HOLLY ZWALF

I'm a transgender man—and a solo dad, to both a four-year-old and a six-month-old baby. I birthed both of my children myself, and while I have a partner with whom I spend time on the weekends, during the week it's usually just me and the kids. I didn't come out as being transgender until the birth of my second baby, and now that I'm presenting as a man, I'm starting to see the world of parenting through very different—and disappointing—eyes.

These days, when I'm at the supermarket with my baby strapped to me and my older child in the trolley, it's astounding how many men give me 'the nod'—that look of admiration and recognition that wrangling two little kids around a supermarket is bloody hard work, and that I deserve a bit of praise. And I actually don't disagree. Doing the weekly food shop as a solo parent is incredibly difficult, and there's a reason we run out of food so often. I avoid it as often as I can. The ridiculous thing is that no one ever praised me or complimented me or gave me 'the nod' when I was doing the exact same thing but presenting as a woman. If anything, I'd get dirty looks from people if my kids were too loud or misbehaving, as if to say I was failing as a mother because I couldn't control my kids.

When it comes to parenting, the expectations put on women and men are worlds apart. Women are expected to sacrifice their careers and their bodies and their lives to their children, and so their efforts go largely unnoticed. For men, however, the standard of parenting is set so embarrassingly low that if they do anything more than the bare minimum, they're hailed as a brilliant father.

Just this morning in a cafe, a man came up to me and my baby and asked me if I was babysitting. I replied that no, I'm the baby's dad.

"Yeah, that's what I mean," he said. "Babysitting."

I told him that in that case, I babysit all day every day, because I'm a solo dad. The man did a double take, and then grinned.

"Oh mate, my hat goes off to you," he said, shaking his head in amazement.

When people used to read me as a solo mother, no one ever said anything like this to me. But these days, I hear this sort of thing all the time, and it makes me so angry. (PSA: It's not 'babysitting' unless they're not your kids.)

Women are expected to sacrifice their careers and their bodies and their lives to their children, and so their efforts go largely unnoticed. For men, however, the standard of parenting is set so embarrassingly low that if they do anything more than the bare minimum, they're hailed as a brilliant father.

The world is organised about gendered divisions of parenting and an assumption that women are the primary caregivers. One issue I've had since transitioning is that the majority of baby-changing tables are situated in the women's toilets. There've been times when I've had to change the baby on the ground or on a park bench because of this. At the swimming pool, I get strange looks when I take the kids into the men's change room—and this is not because I'm trans, mind you; it's because people don't expect dads to do the dirty work of parenting.

In the park, friendly parents get worried looks on their faces and ask leading questions like "So who lives in your house, then?" to try and figure out if the kids have a mum waiting for them at home. Sometimes, to avoid the more awkward conversations, I just nod and let them think what they want to think—and then find myself caught up in a web of incorrect assumptions that I have to try and remember in case I run into them again sometime.

Since transitioning, I've also started to notice that when masculine people do parent, they are not only praised but also almost sexualised. Women swoon at the sight of a big burly man with a little baby (but people rarely swoon at an exhausted mother with a bub). Instagram sites like @ButchesandBabies attest to the fact that this fetishisation is not just limited to cisgendered men.

The sad truth is this: masculinity is still thought of as being in opposition to nurturing (and parenting). When my second baby was born, I started seeing a family therapist who, when I told her that I was going to transition, said that I should still try to be "a mum as well as a dad" because the kids needed to experience the "softer" side of a parent too. Needless to say, I never went back to see her again.

This double standard of parenting is something we are supposed to have done away with by now, isn't it? People talk about gendered parenting roles as quaint relics from the domestic housewife era of the 1950s, but the reality is that the gender division is still alive and well. It makes my blood boil to realise that men still think doing the shopping or looking after the kids is something to be congratulated for, not just a job that all adult members of a household should be equally sharing.

I won't be raising my sons that way, that's for sure.

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OPINION STORY TWO.

OFF THE STRAIGHT AND NARROW: HOW CELEBRATING CURLS EXPANDS CONCEPTS OF BEAUTY, BY SUZI O'SHEA

Remember when we lived through a plague and all the hairdressers were closed? Things got wild. There were viral videos of desperate people taking their chances at styling, cutting and colouring their own hair. (Brad Mondo got me through some dark days of lockdown.)

A big thing that hit home for a lot of people with natural curls was the lack of access to 'creamy crack', a phrase used by the Black community that was introduced to common vernacular by Chris Rock (pre-slap) in his documentary *Good Hair*. The documentary centres on the need for African American women to lather their hair and scalps with toxic chemicals to adhere to a very white beauty standard that has shaped the global beauty industry.

When the world closed down, and creamy crack was no longer available, #QuarantineCurls was a trend that started to grow and reignited the natural hair movement. Celebrities like Gabrielle Union, Megan Thee Stallion, Michelle Obama and Trevor Noah didn't just embrace their natural hair—they rocked it.

For those unfamiliar with the natural hair movement, the OG movement coincided with the Civil Rights Movement in America during the 1950s and '60s. It was a time when African Americans were reclaiming their basic human rights and embracing their unique features that made them beautiful, with an emphasis on natural hair. More recently, the resurgence of the movement was spearheaded in the early 2000s by online influencers, namely Whitney White, also known as Naptural85. White took to YouTube and made tutorial videos on how to style and care for natural hair, sharing her knowledge to the masses and helping women embrace their curls.

This trend kicked off and highlighted a gap in the hair industry: a serious lack of education and knowledge of natural curls. Books were soon being published, groups on social media started to emerge and curly hairdressers became a thing. It was around this time that I came across an interview in *Frankie magazine* with a Melbourne hairdresser by the name of Neel Morley. That article changed my life ... and my hair.

Growing up in the '80s in Western Sydney was tough when you looked the way I did. My Egyptian heritage was undeniable: brown skin, dark features, almond-shaped eyes and wild, crazy hair. Overt racism was kind of on-trend back then, and the bullying was rife.

That led to years of self-loathing and some

Growing up in the ’80s in Western Sydney was tough when you looked the way I did. My Egyptian heritage was undeniable: brown skin, dark features, almond-shaped eyes and wild, crazy hair. Overt racism was kind of on-trend back then, and the bullying was rife.

massive self-esteem issues, which contributed to a bit of an identity crisis. I couldn’t do anything about the “dirty coloured skin”, as they called it, but I could change my “Brillo steel hair”, so I did. I started chemically straightening my hair at the ripe age of ten. The smell was enough to literally make your eyes water, and my hair would stink for a good week after the application. I have vivid memories of my scalp burning, and big chunks of hair falling out from over-processing, but mostly I remember how happy I felt when I washed out the poison and my hair was straight. It was the smallest thing in my control to deny my heritage and try to look like all the girls at school who regarded me with disdain.

Sometime in my late twenties, I started to catch on to this idea that I didn’t have to be like everyone else. I embraced my differences and celebrated my quirks. I was starting to feel comfortable in my own skin. Or at least, I thought I was.

I was thirty-three when I had my beautiful girl. She changed my whole world. When she was about nine months old, she started sprouting the most luscious curls. That was when it hit me. I was still pretending to be someone else. There was still a part of me that wanted to assimilate into the white beauty ideals that were so deeply ingrained in my psyche. That nagging fear of my natural hair being perceived as ugly, or worse, different.

So, I did what any normal person would do. I cut my very long, chemically straightened hair into a buzz cut. I had no idea what it would look like when it grew out—it didn’t matter. What did matter was what my little girl would grow up to believe. Because I want my daughter to know that no matter what society, the media or the beauty industry wants us to believe beauty is, it should never define her self-worth.

When my kid looks at someone who looks different from her, I want her to become curious about their world. I want her to accept that people’s differences are what make them special. More importantly, I want her to be proud of who she is and where she came from.

My natural hair journey has been an awakening of a new-found confidence and acceptance of my identity that makes me damn proud of my Brillo steel. The more out-of-control my hair is, the happier I am that I stand out from the crowd.

It’s not ugly, it’s fierce!

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OPINION STORY THREE.

THE STING, BY LIZ PETRONE

My oldest daughter, who was ten then, was waiting for me when I walked in the door from work. Before I had set my bag down, she was sobbing, her face crumpled under the stress of crying out whatever she had been holding in.

"What's wrong?" I asked, a ticker tape of terrible images flashing through my head as I waited for her to catch her breath enough to manage speech.

"A party," she started, pausing to wipe her nose on her sleeve. "I'm not invited."

And just like that, all the parenting badges and medals I had earned, all the honours of having birthed four children (and the last one on the bathroom floor), all the wisdom of more than a decade's worth of dealing with every flavour of crisis that could come along and reduce one of the six of us to a messy pile of tears flew out of me in one long exhale.

Because right then, I was eight again, still convinced that a girl we'll call Annie was my best friend. I knew it had to be the truth because I'd proclaimed it as many times as anyone would indulge me in listening, and then I'd sealed the deal with those chunky best friend necklaces that together formed one heart.

I was awkward, unpopular and a little jacked up, but the weight of that half a heart against my chest comforted me. No matter what the world took from me, I always had Annie.

That is, of course, until I didn't. Until I realised I never actually had Annie at all. Come to think of it, she'd never worn her half of the interlocking heart necklace, and I'm certain I'd never heard her mention me as her best friend. Hell, I'm not sure I'd ever heard her mention me at all.

And she definitely forgot to mention me when she gave her mother the list of people she wanted to invite to her extra super-special mega-blowout birthday bash at the skate 'n' place roller rink, because out of our entire third-grade class—I was the only one not invited.

You can imagine the heartbreak.

So I stood there in my foyer, thirty years later and very much an adult, still in my adult heels and my adult coat, trying my adult-best to summon words to make

And just like that, all the parenting badges and medals I had earned, all the honours of having birthed four children (and the last one on the bathroom floor), all the wisdom of more than a decade's worth of dealing with every flavour of crisis that could come along and reduce one of the six of us to a messy pile of tears flew out of me in one long exhale.

everything better for the little-love of my life who stood before me as brokenhearted as my sad unrequited necklace. But I couldn't.

The ticker tape was back, except this time, it flashed ideas of what I should say to fix it. "People are terrible" seemed harsh. "Never trust anyone" was likely too bleak. I had nothing, I realised.

Except that wasn't exactly true, either.

I had the sadness of a thirty-year-old heartbreak that I could still feel if I closed my eyes, even though I had grown up to feel wholly loved. I knew there had to be a lesson in this, a teachable moment, maybe, but I hadn't found it yet. What I found was my compassion.

So I stepped out of my heels and the shadow of my past. I shed my coat and the weight of the grudge I might have still been carrying against Annie—not a bad one, like I was going to boil her bunny or send her a horse's head, more the kind where if I saw her in the grocery store and her hands were full, and she needed to reach the good ice cream on the top shelf of the freezer, I would reach in for her and grab it and then run away cackling with it tucked under my arm.

I got down to where I could be at eye level with my bleary-eyed girl. I wrapped her in my arms, rocked slowly, and said the two words I knew to be true: "I know. I know, I know, I know, I know."

Because didn't I? Don't you? Doesn't everyone know what that feels like, some personal version of Annie and the birthday non-invitation heard around the world? Who would ever wish such pain on their kid?

It was later, after the sting of both our wounds had settled into a dull ache in the background and we had words again, when I asked her what she thought she could do to make things better. And I saw the lesson had been there all along.

"What can I do? Maybe nothing," my daughter said, "at least not about the party. But I could try really hard to make sure I don't ever make anyone else feel like that."

That's when Annie rushed out of my heart once and for all. There just wasn't any room left for her, with all the love and gratitude swelling up in there.

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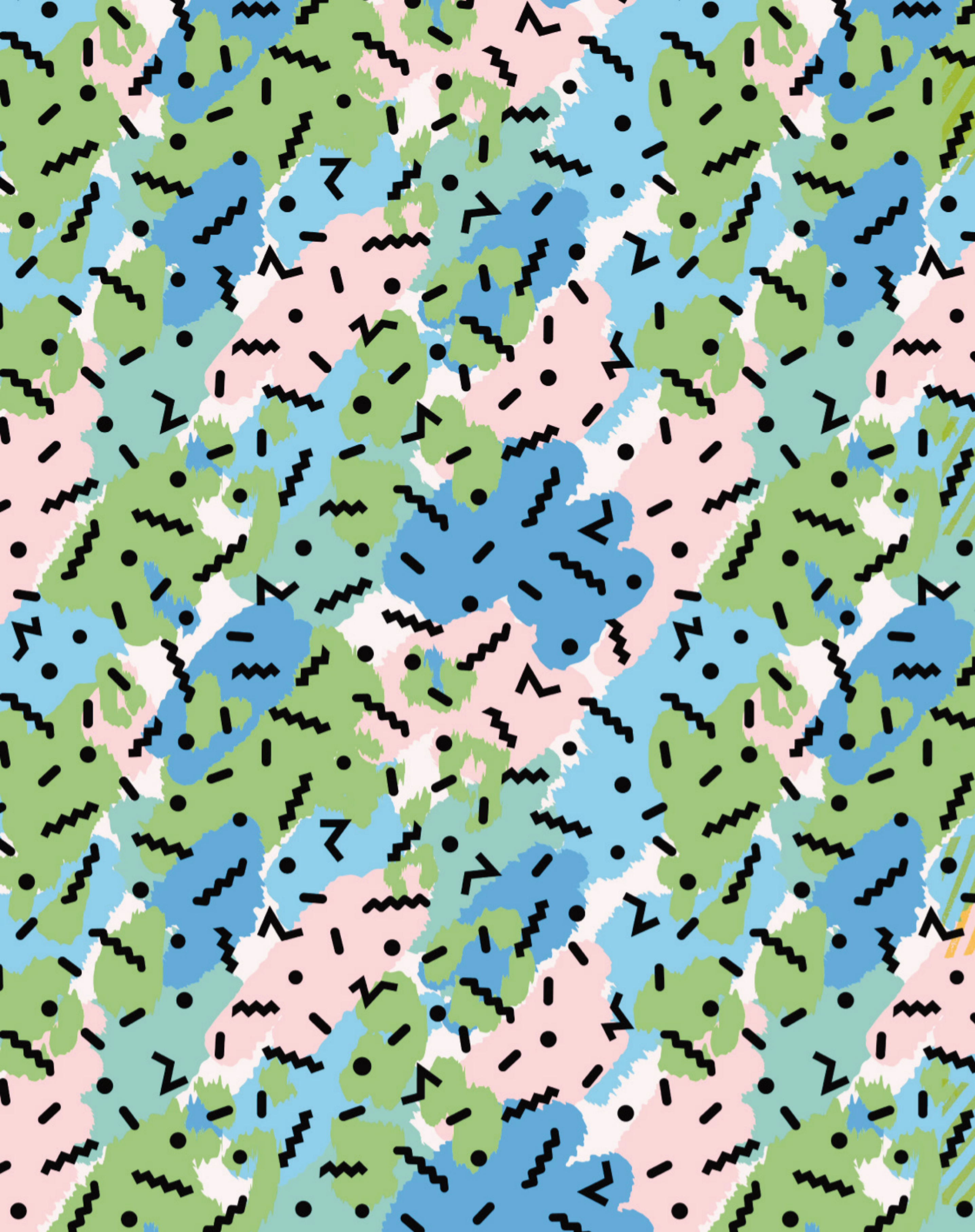

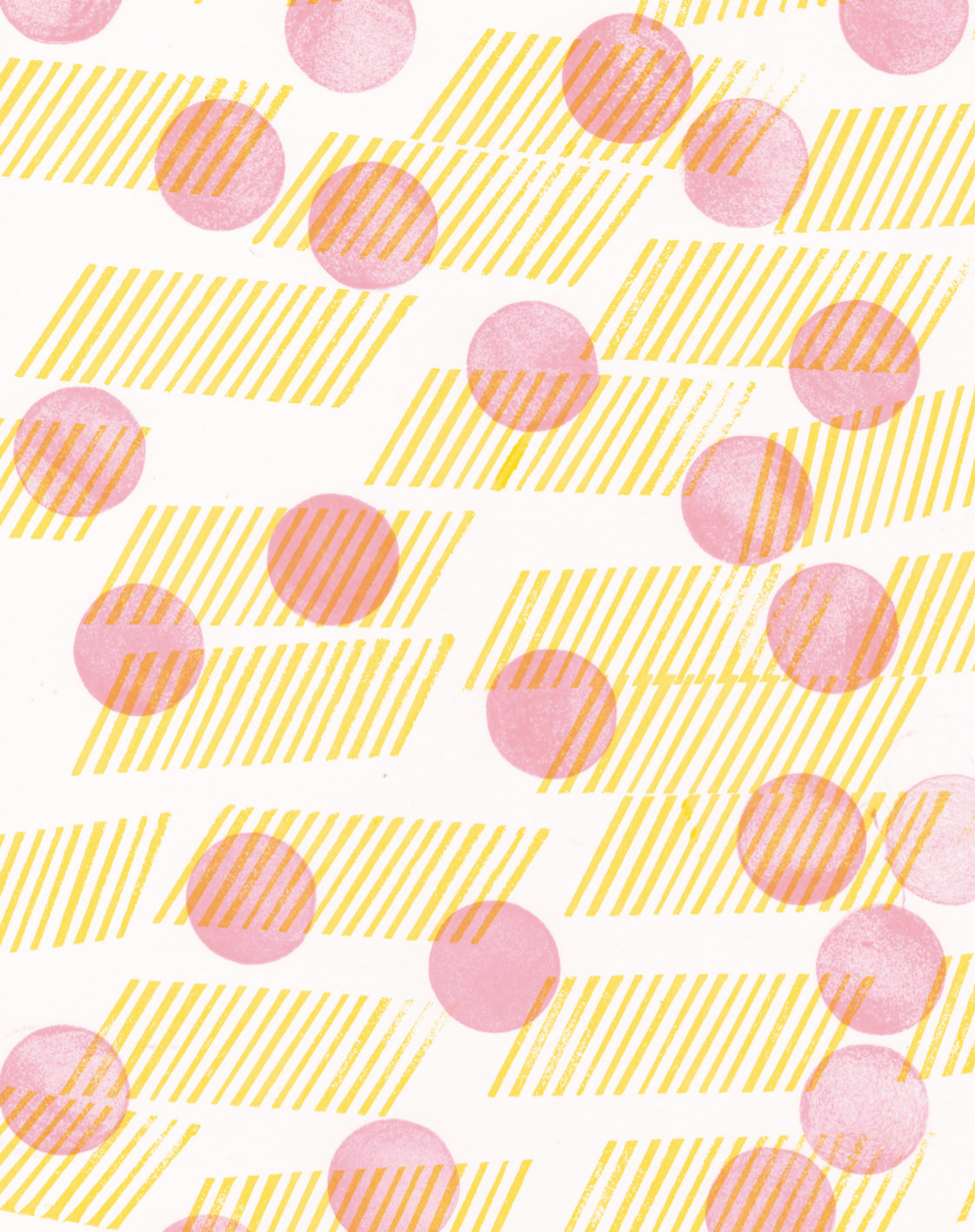

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